

An Interview with
JAMES BONI

An Oral History conducted and edited by
Robert D. McCracken

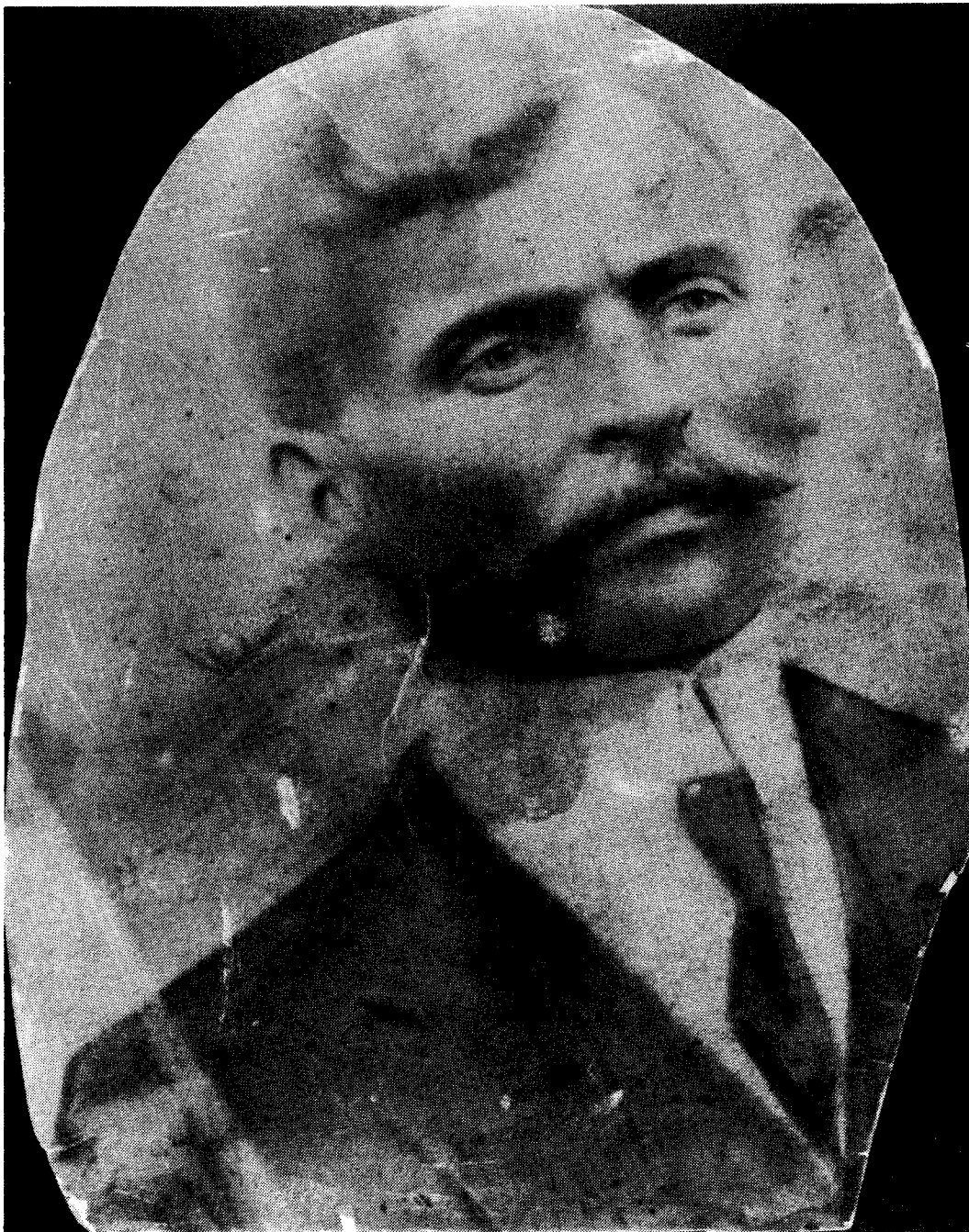
Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada

Tonopah
1990

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James Boni
1990



Pietro "Pete" Boni, father of James Boni.
c. 1905



Dominica Louise Julia Boni, mother of James Boni.
c. 1907

Preface	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	xi
CHAPTER ONE	1
Pietro and Dominica Boni move to Manhattan; Dominica Boni's first exposure to Nevada; Pietro Boni's many endeavors in farming and mining; a growing family; a tragic accident; the wood business, and a hard-working family; attending school in Manhattan; Manhattan social life; the Reliance and White Cap mines; the wood business and the trucking business; snowed in.	
CHAPTER TWO	16
Snowed in in Manhattan; family life; making wine and sausage; Manhattan businesses; the Manhattan mines; the dredge; an accident, and medical care; Italian foods and remarks on Italy.	
CHAPTER THREE	30
Service in the army in World War II; a return to the trucking business; work for the Nye County Road Department and work as road superintendent; old-timers in the road department; hauling ore from a mill in Reveille Valley and ore hauling in general; lessons in the wood business.	
CHAPTER FOUR	45
Retirement; travel to Washington state and to Pahrump; Jim Boni's children; electricity and water in Manhattan in earlier days; the Bonis' childhood homes in Manhattan; churches in the town; law enforcement and memories of Sheriff Bill Thomas; the town's red-light district; placer mining; hard work in the Depression; bootleggers; some area ranches.	
CHAPTER FIVE	60
More discussion of area ranches; dances, and a fight; Belmont in the 1920s and 1930s; boom and bust in Manhattan, and thoughts on the dredge; hauling ore; helping people in the snow; a bid for a stage line; the beauty of Nevada.	
Index	71

PREFACE

The Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP) engages in interviewing people who can provide firsthand descriptions of the individuals, events, and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are not history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiography as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the NCTHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the NCTHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts, and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherency. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often largely unreadable and therefore a waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the NCTHP will,

in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;
- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;
- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context;
- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered but have been added to render the text intelligible; and
- e. make every effort to correctly spell the names of all individuals and places, recognizing that an occasional word may be misspelled because no authoritative source on its correct spelling was found.

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from so many wonderful individuals. I was welcomed into many homes--in many cases as a stranger--and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. In a number of cases I had the opportunity to interview Nye County residents whom I have known and admired since I was a teenager; these experiences were especially gratifying. I thank the residents throughout Nye County and Nevada--too numerous to mention by name--who provided assistance, information, and photographs. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to Chairman Joe S. Garcia, Jr., Robert N. "Bobby" Revert, and Patricia S. Mankins, the Nye County commissioners who initiated this project. Mr. Garcia and Mr. Revert, in particular, showed deep interest and unyielding support for the project from its inception. Thanks also go to current commissioners Richard L. Carver and Barbara J. Raper, who have since joined Mr. Revert on the board and who have continued the project with enthusiastic support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave unwavering support and advocacy of the project within Nye County and before the State of Nevada Nuclear Waste Project Office and the United States Department of Energy; both entities provided funds for this project. Thanks are also extended to Mr. Bradhurst for his advice and input regarding the conduct of the research and for constantly serving as a sounding board when methodological problems were worked out. This project would never have

become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Nye County commissioners and Mr. Bradhurst.

Jean Charney served as administrative assistant, editor, indexer, and typist throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Louise Terrell provided considerable assistance in transcribing many of the oral histories; Barbara Douglass also transcribed a number of interviews. Transcribing, typing, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Jodie Hanson, Alice Levine, Mike Green, Cynthia Tremblay, and Jean Stoess. Jared Charney contributed essential word processing skills. Maire Hayes, Michelle Starika, Anita Coryell, Jodie Hanson, Michelle Welsh, Lindsay Schumacher, and Shena Salzmänn shouldered the herculean task of proofreading the oral histories. Gretchen Loeffler and Bambi McCracken assisted in numerous secretarial and clerical duties. Phillip Earl of the Nevada Historical Society contributed valuable support and criticism throughout the project, and Tom King at the Oral History Program of the University of Nevada at Reno served as a consulting oral historian. Much deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

All material for the NCTHP was prepared with the support of the U.S. Department of Energy, Grant No. DE-FG08-89NV10820. However, any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of DOE.

--Robert D. McCracken
Tonopah, Nevada
1990

INTRODUCTION

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the end of the American frontier. By then, most of the western United States had been settled, ranches and farms developed, communities established, and roads and railroads constructed. The mining boomtowns, based on the lure of overnight riches from newly developed lodes, were but a memory.

Although Nevada was granted statehood in 1864, examination of any map of the state from the late 1800s shows that while much of the state was mapped and its geographical features named, a vast region--stretching from Belmont south to the Las Vegas meadows, comprising most of Nye County--remained largely unsettled and unmapped. In 1890 most of southcentral Nevada remained very much a frontier, and it continued to be for at least another twenty years.

The great mining booms at Tonopah (1900), Goldfield (1902), and Rhyolite (1904) represent the last major flowering of what might be called the Old West in the United States. Consequently, southcentral Nevada, notably Nye County, remains close to the American frontier; closer, perhaps, than any other region of the American West. In a real sense, a significant part of the frontier can still be found in southcentral Nevada. It exists in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents. The frontier-like character of the area also is visible in the relatively undisturbed quality of the natural environment, most of it essentially untouched by human hands.

A survey of written sources on southcentral Nevada's history reveals some material from the boomtown period from 1900 to about 1915, but very little on the area after around 1920. The volume of available sources

varies from town to town: A fair amount of literature, for instance, can be found covering Tonopah's first two decades of existence, and the town has had a newspaper continuously since its first year. In contrast, relatively little is known about the early days of Gabbs, Round Mountain, Manhattan, Beatty, Amargosa Valley, and Pahrump. Gabbs's only newspaper was published intermittently between 1974 and 1976. Round Mountain's only newspaper, the Round Mountain Nugget, was published between 1906 and 1910. Manhattan had newspaper coverage for most of the years between 1906 and 1922. Amargosa Valley has never had a newspaper; Beatty's independent paper folded in 1912. Pahrump's first newspaper did not appear until 1971. All six communities received only spotty coverage in the newspapers of other communities after their own papers folded, although Beatty was served by the Beatty Bulletin, which was published as a supplement to the Goldfield News between 1947 and 1956. Consequently, most information on the history of southcentral Nevada after 1920 is stored in the memories of individuals who are still living.

Aware of Nye County's close ties to our nation's frontier past, and recognizing that few written sources on local history are available, especially after about 1920, the Nye County Commissioners initiated the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). The NCTHP represents an effort to systematically collect and preserve information on the history of Nye County. The centerpiece of the NCTHP is a large set of interviews conducted with individuals who had knowledge of local history. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then edited lightly to preserve the language and speech patterns of those interviewed. All oral history interviews have been printed on acid-free paper and bound and archived in Nye County libraries, Special Collections in the James R. Dickinson

Library at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada. The interviews vary in length and detail, but together they form a never-before-available composite picture of each community's life and development. The collection of interviews for each community can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is unique--some are large, others are small--yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a composite view of community and county history, revealing the flow of life and events for a part of Nevada that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

Collection of the oral histories has been accompanied by the assembling of a set of photographs depicting each community's history. These pictures have been obtained from participants in the oral history interviews and other present and past Nye County residents. In all, more than 1,000 photos have been collected and carefully identified. Complete sets of the photographs have been archived along with the oral histories.

On the basis of the oral interviews as well as existing written sources, histories have been prepared for the major communities in Nye County. These histories also have been archived.

The town history project is one component of a Nye County program to determine the socioeconomic impacts of a federal proposal to build and operate a nuclear waste repository in southcentral Nye County. The repository, which would be located inside a mountain (Yucca Mountain), would be the nation's first, and possibly only, permanent disposal site for high-level radioactive waste. The Nye County Board of County Commissioners initiated the NCTHP in 1987 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions, and quality of life of Nye County

communities that may be impacted by a repository. If the repository is constructed, it will remain a source of interest for hundreds, possibly thousands, of years to come, and future generations will likely want to know more about the people who once resided near the site. In the event that government policy changes and a high-level nuclear waste repository is not constructed in Nye County, material compiled by the NCTHP will remain for the use and enjoyment of all.

--R.D.M.

This is Robert McCracken talking to Jim Boni at his home in Tonopah, Nevada, January 11, 1990.

CHAPTER ONE

Robert McCracken: Jim, could you tell me your name as it would read on your birth certificate?

Jim Boni: Well, James Boni (Jimmy Boni).

RM: You don't have a middle name?

JB: No.

RM: And where and when were you born?

JB: I was born in 1916 in Manhattan, Nevada. I imagine in those days you were usually born at home.

RM: What was your father's name?

JB: Pietro (Pete) Boni.

RM: And do you know where and when he was born?

JB: My dad was born November 7, 1879, and my mother was born November 4, 1884. They came from Mono, Italy - that's Mono County. It's above Rome in northern Italy.

RM: Was your mother from Italy, too?

JB: Yes. My dad came over here in the vintage of 1906. He came to the east coast and went to the coal mines in Pittsburgh, and he didn't think much of the coal mining.

RM: How old was he when he came over?

JB: He was fairly young - in his 20s or so. He didn't like his situation over there so he heard that out West there were good opportunities so he came directly out here. He came to Manhattan because they were mining gold there in the placer mine. He came out there, but

instead of going mining, he and a partner had a lease on the Peavine Ranch.

And then he sent for my mother and she came over from Italy directly to Tonopah. And then she went from here on a stageline that was running through to Manhattan. My dad picked her up in Manhattan and took her to Peavine. My mother told me that when she got to Peavine it was dark. And there were quite a few Indians around there. The next morning she woke up and she said when she looked up she saw those big hills. (She was always afraid of rocks falling on her from those big cliffs.) She got up the next morning and went outside and my dad was already out in the field working. She said she went out in the yard and there were several Indian women. They all started to babble, and that scared her. She wasn't supposed to be there. No white woman was supposed to be there. One of them was the cook, I think, and they did some chores around there. She was kind of scared to death but my dad told her, "Oh, don't worry about it." So then she finally got over that. But for the rest of her life she never, ever got over going by a cliff. For instance, I remember when we used to go to Reno. You know there at Hawthorne where the cliffs are?

RM: Oh yes.

JB: Just when you get to Hawthorne she'd make believe she was sleeping. She didn't want to look at the cliffs.

RM: Is that right? She just couldn't look at those cliffs.

JB: No. She'd [pretend to] doze off, and when we'd get around there and after we'd get by, she'd be awake.

RM: You mean when you'd go by the lake there?

JB: When we'd go by the lake [where it] would slough off rocks.

My dad was farming and he was raising vegetables and taking them to Manhattan, which they called the "Bulldog." (That was down in the placer operation.) He was hauling vegetables there - he had an old rickety wagon. The road ran over the top of Seyler's Lake, and I guess there was water, and some way or another the buggy slipped off into the water and he lost all his produce. So that was it. He said, "No more ranching."

He said, "I'm going to the Central" (they used to call it the Central or the Bulldog), and he said, "I'm going there and work for placer miners" - there were leasers there. So he worked for them. He lived at the Central for a while. Then I think he moved up to Manhattan - he moved up what they called the Tonopah Road. That was the old road that used to come to Tonopah. He lived up there, and that's when Val was born (Val is my oldest brother). He kept on working at the placer for Nick Bozich's outfit. He worked for them for quite a while and then, I guess from there, he did a little bit of everything. He kind of did a little mining and wood chopping.

RM: But all of this was in the Manhattan area?

JB: Yes. It was in the Manhattan area. And in fact, he even worked underground up at the White Cap. I can always remember he told me (I guess he told this to all the kids), "If you've got anything else that you can do, do not go underground because it's very dangerous."

He was working at the Big Pine Mine in Manhattan with Dan Sullivan, and there was a cave-in and they were trapped for about 48 hours. Finally they were dug out, but that still didn't stop him from mining. He used to try to make a decent living, but of course he started having more kids. [chuckles]

RM: How many children did he have?

JB: There were 9 kids.

RM: And all of them lived?

JB: Well, yes, up to about the war.

RM: Where are you in the 9?

JB: I'm right in the middle.

RM: Why don't you name them off?

JB: There was Val, who was the oldest; then there was Pete Jr., who was second; then there was Mary, my sister; then there was Albino - he is still alive; then myself; then Ermand Boni - he died 2 years ago; and then Rosie - she is still here, she lives in Tonopah; then Irene, who is still here; then Leo, who lost his life overseas during World War II.

RM: So when you were born your dad was working in Manhattan.

JB: Yes, he was working in different places.

RM: And your mother took care of the house and the kids?

JB: Oh yes. My dad had done a little bit of everything. In fact, towards the later years he used to lease in the placer. But it was always a hard life - it was hard to work and raise a family. Then he finally went into the wood business and in fact, that's where he lost his life. Every year we'd go get maybe 100 to 200 cords of wood, then saw it up and deliver it and sell it. On this particular day - I can remember very distinctly - it was in '32, I was sitting in school and you could hear this saw going and going. Then I heard a clunk. Well you knew that something had happened. So right away we jumped up and went out there and sure enough, he was sawing wood and he had hit a rock that was in the wood. The saw broke and it cut part of his chin off. His arm was just dangling.

RM: Poor guy. Did the saw fly apart?

JB: Yes, it broke; went all to pieces.

RM: Oh God.

JB: Of course there were no doctors there. They took him up to the house and tried to wrap him the best they could and then they finally took him to Tonopah. That night the doctor tried to operate on him, and I don't know for sure but I think he said a piece of the blade went up in his chest. Sometime during the night he died.

And that was in '32 - I was a sophomore in school. I started my school career in Manhattan from the first grade and I went clear on through and graduated from the high school there.

RM: Where did your dad get the wood that he collected?

JB: Oh, around. He used to get it at Baxter Spring, Timber Hill, Slaughterhouse up above Manhattan and north of Manhattan and areas like that.

RM: How did he haul it?

JB: Well, we had an old solid-wheeled Republic. Val wasn't in business yet and he was kind of the mechanic. We also had a Model-T that they had cut down . . . they used to have attachments that you put on to make a truck out of a Model-T - a chain drive. I can remember that they used to work night and day on those trucks. We had this old solid-tire Republic truck and we also had the Model-T that they fixed up as a wood truck and we used to haul wood with those.

And also they used to take contracts. For instance, when Tybo was going (Treadwell Yukon is what it was called; Tybo is 50 miles from here) they got a 100-cord contract because they were burning wood for the furnace at Tybo. We used to go over there and get wood.

RM: So he would haul wood to Tybo?

JB: Yes. They would get this wood with mules. They had a pack string of mules and they had Spanish pack saddles with hooks on the sides. It's just a leather pouch or pad - pad, I should say - and it's stuffed with willows and hay. And it's a big paddy. That was cinched to the mule and then over that went some hooks on each side. They used to load those, about a quarter of a cord to the mule. Sometimes it was a little heavy for some of those little mules. They used the mules to pack it down from the hill to where the truck could get it.

RM: How big were the pieces of wood they could load on a mule?

JB: They'd usually split them. They were 4-foot lengths and then what they used to do is split them down. They used to use dynamite or wedges. You'd drill them and blast them.

RM: I'll be darned.

JB: Of course, when we were kids we worked with him. My dad would go get wood . . . because we all had to work. It was a big family.

RM: And you were getting dry, dead wood, weren't you?

JB: Yes. Then he would drill a little hole in the log, then put in maybe a quarter of a stick of dynamite and a little cap and just light it.

RM: And that would pop it loose or pop it apart.

JB: Yes.

RM: I'll be darned.

JB: And we always worked with him on that.

RM: Did he do that all year-round or was it a seasonal thing?

JB: Well, usually you'd get it in the summertime when it was good weather, then in the wintertime you had it inside your yard and you'd just saw it up and deliver it.

RM: What kind of a furnace did they have over at Tybo? Did they have a smelter there?

JB: I think they used it to treat the ore. I guess when my dad was still alive we also used to take a contract on the school. They used to buy about 30 cords a year. So then they'd deliver it to the school for a certain price, and I remember one year that my brother and I went down and we got \$1 a cord for bucking it right in half, because they used 2-foot pieces.

RM: How long did it take you to do that?

JB: Well, not too long. Maybe a week or so.

RM: Oh boy.

JB: After my dad got killed, I think we took the school janitor job just to kind of keep the money coming in. I can't remember exactly the date - Val built that garage in Manhattan, which is known as Val's Garage.

RM: Oh, I see - your brother Val.

JB: Yes.

RM: By the way, what was your mother's name?

JB: Her maiden name was Minny (Dominica) Gensi - Dominica was what she went with.

RM: Tell me what it was like going to school in Manhattan. How big a school was it?

JB: Well, the school building still exists over there. There were 3 rooms. We had a primary teacher who taught the first 4 grades in one room and in the second room they taught the next 4 grades up to the eighth grade and from there it was high school, and they had the principal and the teacher who taught that in the third room.

RM: How many kids would you say were in the school when you were there?

JB: Oh, I don't know. When I first went to school, I imagine there were 30 to 40 kids. And as time went on it kind of held the same. It depends on what the situation was in Manhattan - how much work there was and so forth. There were quite a few leasers who used to lease and . . . when I graduated, though, there were only 3 or 4 kids that graduated in my class. There might have been 10 kids in the whole high school. It seemed like the school kept getting less kids because there was no work in Manhattan then, so people started moving out.

RM: Did you have sports teams or anything like that?

JB: Yes. We didn't have basketball because we didn't have a court. We just used to get one of those medicine balls and throw it at each other or try to make a basket with it. But we used to play Round Mountain in track meets or tournaments.

RM: Was Round Mountain your archrival?

JB: Yes. We had 3-legged races and sack races and things like that. And we kind of got a little ball team up, but we weren't as good as we thought we were.

RM: Did any of the teachers stand out in your mind?

JB: Well, yes. One teacher who taught me when I was in the sixth grade - her name was Betty Roberts (her maiden name was Betty Donahue) - taught in Manhattan for a good many years and then she finished her career here in Tonopah. But she's deceased now.

RM: The Boni kids must have made up a pretty good portion of the student body, didn't they?

JB: Oh yes. [laughter] There were quite a few of them in the school. But I just went along and I didn't think much about school. I just went to school and went home; I wasn't a top-notch student.

RM: What was childhood like growing up in Manhattan?

JB: Well, really we didn't do much. To kill time, usually a bunch of us would get together, and we used to - in the evenings - take a walk and go clear up to the end of town and walk clear back down, just to be doing something. But then as we got a little older my brother had a Model-T and he had another Maxwell car and in the evenings we used to ride around with him. That was in later years. I really can't think of anything that was real exciting.

RM: Did you have dances or anything like that in school?

JB: Oh yes. That's one thing - we had a lot of dances. In fact, 2 of my brothers used to play in the band. They had their own band. I don't know if Val's got it, but he used to have a poster, "Big Dance in Round Mountain Tonight" or something like that. They played in Round Mountain and Manhattan. We'd have a dance one week in Round Mountain and we'd have a dance in Manhattan one week. Then sometimes there'd be a dance at Darroughs Hot Springs. Usually at Darroughs Hot Springs they'd get Millie Acree from Austin - she played the music.

RM: Millie Acree.

JB: Yes. You've probably heard of her.

RM: Yes, I think I have. Her name has come up. Was it a big deal to go to Darroughs or Round Mountain or anything?

JB: Oh yes. That was the "in" thing. We'd always go over there and have some nice times. That was when Manhattan was pretty good - there was a lot of work. The Reliance Mine was there and they were hiring men. And the White Caps was going, so they had quite a few men. So there were quite a few people there and the dances used to turn out pretty well.

RM: How much do you know about the Reliance?

JB: Well, Joe Cowden, Matt Kane and Antone Johnson were down at the placer. They'd dug a hole down about 100 feet and that's usually where the placer comes in. So they dug this hole with the idea of having a placer mine.

RM: And they were going to dig down on the placer and then tunnel out on the bedrock?

JB: That's right. And when they went down they found an awful rich streak. So it didn't take very long after word got out that they had a rich streak for a company to come in right away and buy it. So they started mining hard rock.

RM: They found a rich streak in the hard rock?

JB: Yes. They started mining hard rock and then they worked for a good many years and took awful good ore out of there. In fact, I hauled most of the ore from that Reliance Mine up to the mill. They had that Red Mill which is still partly there.

RM: Which is where, up at the head of town?

JB: No, it's below. It's still an abutment, you know. Where the crusher was and where the mill was.

RM: Was that mill built when you were a kid?

JB: Oh yes, 1913.

RM: And was the Reliance Mine developed before your time?

JB: No, it wasn't. There was nothing there - just placer holes. You see, these guys used to dig the placers down in the gulch, and that's what it was. They dug a hole for placer and they happened to hit it right.

RM: Can you remember when the Reliance Mine was discovered?

JB: Nineteen thirty-two. My brother Val was in business then.

RM: How much older is Val than you?

JB: Oh, about 8 years.

RM: Did the Reliance employ quite a few men?

JB: Oh yes. In fact, I think I've got a picture down in the trunk with some of my souvenirs, as I call them, that you hold from your old days, of some of the Reliance workers and there were 15 or 20 guys there. They had a change room, and they had it pretty nice.

RM: Were they working more than one shift?

JB: Yes, they were working several shifts. They had a pretty good crew.

RM: What was another mine there when you were growing up?

JB: Well, the White Cap. In fact, it's still in existence up above town. That was going pretty good - Mannington was hauling the ore from there and then the contract finally went to Witenburg. They used to make several loads a day. Being that that was a base rock, they had us take it in here and ship it out to the smelter. They couldn't treat it over there. So that was going, and it hired quite a few men.

RM: So they'd haul it to Tonopah and then ship it out on the railroad?

JB: Yes. The railroads were still here.

RM: You mentioned Mannington.

JB: Yes, Mannington Trucking.

RM: And then you mentioned another name?

JB: Well, Witenburg - he's well-known around here - Charles F.

Witenburg, I believe. He took the trucking over in later years and then finally they shut the mine down and after that leasers took it over and they shipped a few carloads of ore, but it didn't go so well because it's pretty hard for a leaser.

It was the same way in the placer. At one time there were a lot of

leasers and they were making pretty good money until they shut everything off. Then when Natomas Dredging came in there they [got rid of] all the leasers. I think Natomas Company was in there drilling those core drills in '34. In fact, I worked for them as water boy for 6 months or so. They drilled that and then after that the dredge company took it over and they put a big dredge in Manhattan.

RM: Were the leasers in both hard rock and placer?

JB: No - they were all placer down there.

RM: OK. But up at the White Cap they were hard rocking. And were they leasing it there?

JB: Yes.

RM: Did they lease at the Reliance at all?

JB: I don't think so. I think more or less the company thought they had worked it out. And when the Reliance was going there was another mine right below it that was working also. It was kind of a promotion deal, I guess. The name was Gold Metals.

RM: The White Cap dates back to earlier times, doesn't it?

JB: Oh yes. That's an old mine; that shaft is deep. I think it was maybe 1000 feet and then it goes underground for hundreds of feet. It was kind of treacherous. A lot of men lost their lives at the White Cap.

RM: Is that right? What was the problem?

JB: Well, sometimes it was carelessness, riding the bucket, as they call it, which they shouldn't have done. They should have ridden the cage. That was some of it. And I guess some of it was bad gas and explosions.

RM: It was a gassy mine, then?

JB: Well, yes. All these mines were pretty gassy. And I think the biggest problem with those guys was having missed holes. They'd put a

round in, and then maybe they'd have a missed hole. If they'd put in 10 holes or 10 shots, then when they'd go back the next morning or that afternoon when the gas cleared out, if they'd pick into a missed hole, that's it. That would kill 2 or 3.

RM: Yes, right. Do you remember any of the other mines that were going when you were growing up there?

JB: Well, there was a lot of activity but I think it was all promotion deals. There was the Amalgamated above Manhattan which had a big tram, but I think they really never did ship much ore. Then also there was a Consolidated Mine which had a mill, and they did mill custom ore.

Emerson Hyde was the mill man up at the Consolidated. They did mill quite a bit of ore.

RM: But they were doing a lot of custom ore too?

JB: Well, yes. They would take it at various times.

RM: We might mention here that "custom" is when you're doing it for little miners.

JB: Yes - for somebody else. I still think if they had a custom mill today a lot of these things would be promoted more, right now. Because there are a lot of places where a leaser could make some money. And if he had a custom mill or someplace to take it . . .

RM: Yes - that would open up some opportunities.

JB: Yes it would.

RM: Now you graduated from school in Manhattan in what year?

JB: Thirty-four. Then I kind of went in the wood business. There'd be 50, 60, 100 cords of wood in the yard in the wintertime. Then I started running trucks; I kind of owned a trucking business. But before I went to the service I was running trucks and hauling ore and moving houses.

RM: For the miners in the area?

JB: For different miners everywhere. I had a state-wide contract permit and we'd move houses . . . it was kind of a business.

RM: What kind of trucks did you have?

JB: We had Fords and Chevys. We had dump trucks and flatbeds.

RM: And they were pneumatic tubes, or tires?

JB: Yes (referring to Model-T and Republic trucks). I've still got the wheels up there off that Republic hard-tire. When my dad had the Tybo contract, my brother was going over there [with him] so I rode with them. It was an open-cab hard-tire, and we rode clear into Tonopah and stayed here in town, and the next morning we got up and headed back to go to Tybo, and man, that was a long way in that old solid tire, but we made it.

RM: They were rough riding, weren't they?

JB: Oh yes. And I can remember one thing distinctly on that old hard-wheel Republic truck: My brother and I came into town and we used to get gas in barrels. Most of the roads were dirt, and the Manhattan road was dirt. And so we got a load of gas and headed out and I was pretty good until I got to Rye Patch. I could see the lights, but it seemed like it took forever till that light came to where we were close. Then it got kind of cold, and I was just shivering, and I was afraid to fall asleep because I'd fall out of the open cab. I guess I stayed awake and finally we got to the foothills - Spanish Springs, that's where the old road went. And after we got into the foothills it warmed up, and it wasn't so cold. Then we finally made it into Manhattan. But boy, that's the longest ride I ever took.

RM: How in the world did your dad handle the open cab in the winter?

JB: Well, you'd just bundle up. I can't exactly remember the year, but it's also in that brochure I've got down there, that one year we got snowed into Manhattan. I think we were 45 days without mail or anything coming in.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: You mentioned you got snowed in there. Tell me about that.

JB: The snow was clear up to our ears. [chuckles] Oh, it was terrible.

RM: On the level or in the banks?

JB: All over; we couldn't get in or out. Fortunately none of us got sick, because there was no way to get a doctor in there. And my brother and Joe Cowden had an old Dodge. So they got the bright idea that they would make a snowplow and put a tandem axle on it. So they would work on it for a week, and then we'd take it out for a trial run. And the snow plow was too close and it would buckle under, so they'd take it back and work on it and then they tried to put a tandem on it - a dead axle - another rear end behind his Dodge. Well, they put cleats on it and put rubber belts on. They'd make about 2 rounds and the belt would fall off of the thing. They couldn't hold it on, so they gave that up.

Then they started to run the sled. My brother Pete went to work on it, and I think Joe Francisco [did too]. They made a daily run because the mail couldn't come in. You could only get to Seyler's Lake through the valley road - you couldn't come over the hill. They'd go down by San Antone and that way. So then they'd meet the mail truck at Sayler's Lake and take the mail to Manhattan with the sled. And then the mail truck would head back to Tonopah. The mail driver's last name was West. He had the mail contract for quite a while. That's one of the things I remember distinctly - man, it was kind of tough.

RM: It must have been amazing to be snowed-in that long.

JB: Well, we never gave it much thought, though, which was a good thing; we'd have gone crazy.

RM: How did people spend their time in a typical winter evening?

JB: Well, they'd stay home and keep warm. But if a person was older, there were a few bars there, and he'd be in the bars. But the younger set . . . They did try to start a thing up for kids - they always had something going for the kids. For instance, they'd have a gymnasium. They'd get an old building for a gym, or one outfit was in there and they had pool tables and then they also were trying to [promote some sort of] miniature golf course. But it didn't go over very well . . . I don't know. There wasn't really much to do.

RM: Did people read a lot?

JB: Yes, and listened to the radio. But we didn't have radios, really. Nobody had radios. The first radio my brother got was a Zenith - it was a battery set. I can remember that we'd go to somebody's house and he'd get that thing and turn it on and try to get KNX.

RM: KNX from Los Angeles?

JB: Yes. You'd get it to come in fairly well, and then you'd get a lot of static. Maybe you'd get a little bit of news on the thing and then you'd want to listen to something else and you'd get static again . . . That went on for quite a while and then finally the radios came in more clearly. So then my brother bought a Knight console, and that was a nice radio. Then we used to get radio stations a lot better. In fact, I think he's still got that radio.

RM: And you were really uptown with that, weren't you?

JB: Oh yes, we were really big shots.

RM: Do you remember some of the programs you listened to?

JB: KNX was one of the top ones. They had mostly music and news.

RM: And was this in the '20s and '30s?

JB: Well, I think it was in the '30s. Another thing we had at home was a phonograph - with the speaker with the dog picture on it. We had the cone records, and we used to play them on it. And then we picked up an organ someplace and my sister used to always sit at it. She started playing it and I guess she learned to play it by ear. Right today, she still plays by ear and she is a very good piano player.

RM: And she never had a lesson?

JB: Never had a lesson. My older sister played a little bit, but she wasn't as good as my younger sister.

And that was what you'd do around the house at nights. Of course we always had something to do. My dad used to make sausage, and he'd make a little wine. We used to have fun.

RM: Did he grow a garden for the family?

JB: Well, no. There was no way to grow a garden because you couldn't have any water.

RM: But he did make wine?

JB: Oh yes.

RM: Where would he get his grapes?

JB: He got some from Beatty, Nevada, and I think he got some from California. I used to help him mash up the grapes to make the wine. And he used to always make sausage.

RM: What would he use for that?

JB: He used pork and beef. He'd get it from the butcher shop there - at that time there was a pretty good butcher shop in Manhattan.

RM: Tell me about the businesses that were in town.

JB: Well, there was Herman Kaulburner - he had a little store and a jewelry store. Of course, we had the U.S. Post Office.

RM: Who was the postmistress?

JB: Ida West, I think her name was.

RM: Was she related to the man who had the mail route?

JB: No. The names were spelled differently. Then as you came down the street going west we had a bar (but that was later). On downhill, then, we had a big mercantile store. Then you came down the street and there was a boardinghouse and it was run by Ferig. She had a restaurant there. And then I think there was a whole block of buildings in there. And then there was a mercantile store, and Southworth ran that.

RM: What did the mercantile store carry?

JB: Well, it was like a grocery store, and it had shoes and a few commodities - it was kind of like a hardware store and a grocery store. It was a pretty big building, and that was the only place you could really buy [things]. And then right below that there was a saloon. And this was all in one block, really right in tight together. It was run by Tony Brackett.

RM: Tony Brackett?

JB: Yes. That was an old family there - the Bracketts. Then you came down the street a little more and there was what you'd call a candy store or a drug store and ice cream parlor. And that was run by a Mr. Rippy. And then I think Franciscos had a grocery store across the street. They're an old family there also. And they had kind of a store and the butcher shop and in fact, at that time, that's where my brother worked - he worked in their garage for a good many years till he built his own place. And then as you came down the street there used to be a bakery shop there in the early days - it was run by Schragel. He used to make bread at first, and then he kind of tapered off, and then he kind of

quit. Then that mercantile store burned down; it burned down one night from one end to the other. That wiped everything out. That's when they started that bar up the street, I think. And then they started that other bar which was run by Frank Slate.

RM: Do you remember about when the fire was that burned out the mercantile store?

JB: Well, that must have been sometime in the '30s. Rippy's store down the street was still in business, and different people would start a store, then they'd quit, and then they'd start another one. They couldn't make it, so really, as far as business goes, there weren't too many people. Before that I think they had some nice 2-story and 3-story buildings that burned down one night.

RM: Was it all at the same time?

JB: No. That was way before.

RM: Oh - before your time.

JB: Yes. There was an awful big flood that came through Manhattan and wiped out a lot of buildings, too.

RM: Were the mines, as you remember them, kind of up and down, or were they pretty constant in terms of jobs?

JB: No, they were up and down, just like any mining community. I can remember in Manhattan when a mining boom would come and it would go for one season. Then they'd lay everybody off and they'd quit. And Round Mountain would be the same - some company would take over and it'd go up, they'd hire quite a few people and then it would go down. Of course people worked for [both] Manhattan and Round Mountain. Witenburg was kind of a mining man, and he used to start different properties. They might work 6 months, and then they'd shut them down. And it was kind of

tough.

RM: They were basically gold, weren't they?

JB: Oh, yes.

RM: I've been told the ore was complex and hard to treat, but of course the placer wasn't.

JB: Well, up at White Cap it was, but down below, at the Reliance, it wasn't hard to treat. In fact, I even worked at the mill there - the Red Mill as they called it. I worked as a crusher man for a while and then I was down in the mill and they treated most of that stuff in the Manhattan mill.

RM: You mean from the hard rock?

JB: Yes - the Reliance. That's where they milled their ore.

RM: What was it, a stamp mill?

JB: Yes.

RM: Do you remember how many stamps it had?

JB: Well, there were 2 banks. It must have been about - let's see, how many banks are 5 stamps? In fact, I think the museum up here has a set of the stamps.

RM: That's right - I think they do.

JB: I think they've got both sets. It was noisy, especially if you worked there. Your head would be ringing; you'd have to have ear plugs. But you could hear it, and you could hear when the mill quit or when it was starting. And then I guess the dredge came in just before I went to the service.

RM: When did you go in the service?

JB: Forty-two. I think in the early '40s they started getting ready and building the dredge.

RM: Was that a big boon to Manhattan?

JB: Oh yes.

RM: Did it employ a lot of people?

JB: Yes, it hired quite a few. I can remember, distinctly, the man who was running the dredge. He was the headmaster. We were contracting then, so we asked him for a job and he kind of hemmed and hawed. Then in later years he made the remark that he didn't want to hire "none of these yokels from Manhattan" because he hired his help out (and he did lots of that). After the war they did finally hire a lot of guys from Manhattan; they had to because there weren't too many guys to get. But anyway, the dredge took out over \$1 million. That's in that article too - how much they took out in gold.

Then when I came back from the service the dredge maybe ran a couple more years. I got out in '45, so maybe in '46 they got to the lower end of town. It was getting pretty hard to keep that dredge afloat, so they finally shut her down and tore her down and moved her to Battle Mountain. I can remember when I came out of the army I'd sit up there and I could hear that old dredge just squealing, you know - eeeeeeee. You'd hear it at night; they had 3 shifts on it. That thing used to squeal like everything.

RM: Was it working off of bedrock?

JB: Yes. It would cut about 4 feet of bedrock, and they couldn't go much deeper.

RM: It would cut 4 feet into bedrock? Wow.

JB: Yes. You see, they had those big buckets. In fact, I think those buckets were a quarter of a yard apiece. I don't know how many they had either - I didn't pay much attention to the dredge. But it was on a

bucket ladder, and that thing would keep churning. The whole thing was afloat and they had 2 stackers and they'd cut pretty good bedrock. That's where the good stuff is in placer - bedrock. And in some places they couldn't cut the ledge so they would have to kind of sneak through, and there were several places where they had to pull in. And then there were a lot of places where there was pretty rich material on the bank so they'd take dozers and scrapers and pull the gravel in front of it. They didn't lose any money.

RM: Did it work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week?

JB: Yes.

RM: It never shut down, in effect.

JB: No; they tried to keep going. The only time they shut down was for repairs and cleanup.

RM: And who owned the dredge?

JB: Well, there were 2 outfits. Natomas had an interest in it and I don't remember the name, but there was another company or maybe 2 other companies involved in it. You know how those companies go together - each one has a certain interest.

RM: What did you do for health care out there? Was there a doctor in town?

JB: No. You know, in the early days they did have a little hospital in Manhattan, but I don't know how long it ran. I remember once my brother and I were at home - Val was running the garage then - and this Butch Turner called that he was stuck down by Spanish Springs. So of course I always went with my brother, because I thought, "Well, that's a good ride." You know how a kid is - he always wants to go.

RM: Sure.

JB: So I went with him and it was dark. We headed down the canyon, not even thinking that the man who was stuck might have started his truck and come a little farther and a little farther. So we got above Pipe Springs and there he was in a middle of the road, with everything dark. And on those Model-Ts, when you stepped on your brake, you'd lose your engine and your lights. So when Val saw him, naturally he stepped on the brake and probably the reverse too - Model-Ts had the 3 peddles.

RM: Oh, I didn't know that.

JB: Yes. They never had a gear-shift and a clutch, they just had the brake that would pull it out in neutral or put it in neutral, then they had the 3 peddles - you had low, and then you put it on and it'd be high and then, if you wanted to back up you pushed this one pedal half in and then pushed that in reverse, and it'd go backwards. It was a planetary transmission, is what it is. Then you'd have the brake inside.

Anyway, he saw him right there in front of him so he put the binders on, and the engine quit, so he turned and went up the bank and tipped over. So there he was. I got out and Butch Turner was standing there and we had to lift the car off my brother because it was on him, and after he got out from under the Model-T he said, "Is everybody all right?"

I said, "Yeah, everybody seems all right." Then I felt something kind of wet on my leg, so I reached down like this and came up and there it was, blood. So I said, "I don't know. I think I cut my leg." Sure enough, I had cut it right across my toes. It's a wonder I didn't lose them all. So we came back to Manhattan, and there was a doctor there. I think at the time he was working out of Round Mountain. Anyway, he worked on my foot and he did a very good job. But it was a good many

months that I was hobbling along. In fact we had to cut the boot off.

RM: If you hadn't had the boot on you'd have lost your toes.

JB: Oh yes. So I got by that, after hobbling along for many months. It just left a little scar and it didn't effect my toes any.

One thing I remember very vividly - I think this was in about '32 - I had my tonsils out sitting in my front room. There was a traveling doctor, and he used to charge \$30, I guess, to take your tonsils out. He'd just set us up in the front room in the chair, he'd [chuckles] go in there and take those things and cut out your tonsils.

RM: No anesthetic?

JB: Not very much.

RM: What did he give you, a little shot in the tonsil?

JB: That's about all. I can remember he said, "Well, how's that feel?" after he took the tonsils out.

And I said, "I feel some back there" - still some skin a-hanging - so he clipped that off. I went to bed and my throat was sore for quite a while but I finally got over it. Today they wouldn't even allow you to do that.

RM: No. They wouldn't think of it.

JB: But I got by . . . I had a lot of trouble with my tonsils. But that stays pretty well in my mind when I think about it, what a stupid guy I was.

RM: Well, after the little hospital there folded, did you have to come to Tonopah?

JB: Yes. We had to either come to Tonopah or if there was a doctor in Round Mountain we'd have to get him, but doctors were few and far between. My mother and all the families there depended on the medical

book and some of the old cures that we had.

RM: Do you remember any of the cures your mother would use on you?

JB: I can remember - I think it was flax seed - that we took for kind of a physic. It was awful tasting but we used to drink it. And I remember the bella donna plaster; in fact, I've still got a scar on my chest where somebody made it too hot and put it on me or left it on me too long, I guess. They called them a bella donna plaster.

RM: I wonder if it had bella donna in it?

JB: No. In Italian bella donna means 'pretty lady.' I don't know why they called it that, but I just remember that they did. And my brother used to be a doctor around there when we were older. We'd get a sore throat and he'd take 3 percent aragol and a swab and he'd say, "Open your mouth." So I'd open my mouth and he'd paint my tonsils.

RM: Did it work?

JB: Oh, you bet. It works. Then we had a remedy that was pretty good. We always had a fire going in the front room in the wintertime, and if we'd get kind of sick and have a sore throat we'd take some wine and put it in the pot and we'd take some apples and slice them up in the wine and then we'd take some cinnamon sticks and boil that wine for maybe 15 minutes on the wood stove. Then before it was done we'd take a match and light it and it'd burn the alcohol off. Then we'd put it in a cup and sip it, and drink it just as hot as we could. After we got that cup of wine drunk we'd get in bed and man, we used to sweat. And that would sweat the cold out. You'd get under the covers and keep covered, and you'd sweat for about an hour or two but it seemed like it would knock your cold.

I guess my mother had some other remedies that I didn't even pay

attention to because I was a young kid just running around there. I didn't know much that was going on.

RM: What kind of foods did she prepare? Was it Italian food?

JB: Yes - spaghetti, ravioli and . . . of course we had a lot of soup. One thing I remember - we didn't get many sweets, but if we'd happen to get a cake, there were about 9 kids and then maybe 3 or 4 adults, so we'd have our slice and that was it. You ate what you had and there was no more. That's why my dad used to make a lot of food stuff like salami, sausage and head cheese. And we used to always have a pitcher of wine on the table, regardless. It was always on there, and he'd mix ours with water.

RM: Even as children?

JB: Yes. And if we didn't want it, OK. But if we wanted more wine he'd say, "No more until the next meal."

RM: And it was wine that he had made, no doubt. Do you remember anything else about your mother's cooking or the kind of table she set for you?

JB: Well, it was all more or less Italian cooking, rice and spaghetti and ravioli and soup.

RM: Garlic and oregano?

JB: I still like garlic - I go for garlic. So it was just regular. But it was tough work to make ravioli so we'd have it maybe on a special occasion. And I remember on New Year's we'd always have chestnuts.

RM: Did your mother and father keep touch with the old country?

JB: Oh yes. My mother always wrote back and forth and she had quite a few relations. I don't think my dad had too many relations back there . . . I think he had a brother who came to this country and then I think

he left and he never did hear from him. My mother's the one who more or less kept up with her relations, and she had a sister over there.

RM: Did any of them ever come over here?

JB: I had a couple of uncles who came over but they didn't stay too long, then they left and went back. (That is, of the relatives that she knew of.)

RM: What do you think motivated your mother and father to come over here?

JB: I guess times weren't very good in Italy and there was no work and I guess they figured . . . maybe at that time they were pushing, "Go West" and "Gold is the Opportunity." And maybe he got wind of it and . . .

RM: And your dad just heard about the Manhattan boom . . .

JB: Well, after he came to Pittsburgh. He worked in a coal mine a while but that was a nasty job. I guess he heard about gold in the West so he came right on out and stayed right here.

RM: But then your father sent for your mother. Had they been married before he came over?

JB: Yes. They were married in Italy. Then he came over and stayed a year or so and then he sent for her. Then she came over and they spent all their time here. In fact, my mother spent all her time here.

RM: I notice that you have blue eyes, is that right?

JB: Well, gray.

RM: Gray-blue, yes. What color were your parent's eyes? Did they have light eyes too?

JB: Yes.

RM: You think of Italians as being darker, but northern Italy is different.

JB: Yes, a lot of people have said that. But my brothers had dark hair and some of the girls had dark hair and my mother had dark hair. In fact, she never had a gray hair. I think she was in her 70s before she started getting gray hair. And, of course I had dark hair too, at the time. [chuckles]

RM: How old was your mother when she passed away?

JB: She was 90 years old.

RM: Is that right? And did she always live in Manhattan?

JB: Well, she moved to Tonopah, I think right after the war. During the war she stayed in Manhattan and she was getting lonesome over there and she was getting older. We finally got her a house here and then she stayed here till she died.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: Jim, did you notice any prejudice against Italians or anything like that, or were they treated like everybody else?

JB: Oh, I don't know. I think there was a little bit. I can remember my dad, when he was working at the White Cap, needed a job real bad, and he came home one night and told my mom, "Well, I got in a fight with somebody."

And she said, "Why?"

And oh, because he called him a dirty name, you know. Italian, black Italian, something like that. So they kind of got in a fight, and I don't know what happened, if they laid them both off or what. But working on those mines was seasonal, anyway - it was up and down. They'd go and then they'd hire someone and then they wouldn't hire. But he didn't think much of the White Cap Mine, anyway. So he kind of stayed away from it.

RM: Then what year did you go into the service?

JB: Forty-two.

RM: And which branch did you go in?

JB: The army.

RM: Were you sent overseas?

JB: In the ETO [European Theater of Operation]. Yes, I spent all my time there. I was real bitter because when I had my basic training in Camp Roberts, California, when I was done with basic I thought, "Well, I have my 13 weeks and I'll come home for a few days," but no way. They put us on the train and they shipped us right on through. In fact, when the train stopped in Elko for about 5 minutes, I was about about to . . .

[chuckles]

RM: To go over the hill?

JB: But they had somebody at the door, see. [laughter] So anyway we went right back east to Fort Dix to the staging area. We stayed there for a couple of weeks or maybe a month and then overseas we went. So I spent all my time overseas.

RM: Whereabouts?

JB: Well, I spent nearly 6 months in England. And then from England I went to Africa. That's when they were processing all the prisoners that they were taking in. And from there I went back to France. And then from France I went to Italy. And then from Italy I went back to France, and then I left Marseilles and came home. That was 3-1/2 years later.

RM: Wow. And you didn't come home once during that period?

JB: No. And they kept telling us, "Your replacements are coming," because we had the points at that time. He said, "Well, you have so many points, you have so much time, you're automatically home," you know. Well, we didn't get the replacements even though we had the points and all.

Finally we did get home but that's another thing that really worried us: When the war ended in Europe, they were still fighting the Japanese, so they were going to send us through the Panama Canal. And I thought, "That ain't fair." I said, "They should ship us back to the States, reprocess us, then ship us over." But fortunately the war ended. We dropped that bomb and that was it.

RM: You were probably glad they dropped it then, weren't you?

JB: Oh, you'd better believe it. I think I'd have gone AWOL.

RM: What was your job in the military?

JB: I was an infantryman first and then when we shipped over we started going as a guard unit. And then as a guard unit they made 100-man MP companies out of us. So I had a lot of MP duty on the streets and processing prisoners and all that.

RM: So you were basically military police all the way through?

JB: Military police all through - yes. Because we always had guard duty here and there and everywhere. What used to get me is, like when Rome fell, we were right on the [enemy's] tail. As soon as Rome fell, the next morning we were right in there and we took over. I didn't like that because we were getting pretty close to the front line. And another thing that really griped me was that every month they would take one man out of our unit to go to the front lines.

RM: Oh, no.

JB: And we'd all sweat it. We'd all say, "Well, who's going to be next?" And that really irked me.

RM: So it was kind of like a lottery every month.

JB: That's right. You didn't know if you were the boy who was going to go or not.

RM: Because the guys who went didn't last long, did they?

JB: Oh no. So that kind of always kept on your mind. When I left France there was a major there who I used to interpret for, and I drove around in the Jeep, and he'd gone up in rank pretty well. So when everybody left he said, "Jim, you'd better stay." He said, "You can be staff sergeant to the motor pool right quick."

And I said, "No. I wouldn't stay for your rank." I said, "I'm going home and I'm getting out." Because I was kind of disappointed - I had tried to get in to headquarters to get out of my outfit, and they

wouldn't let me go. And I tried to get in the motor pool because that was my business - trucks. That's all I knew. I drove trucks and I was on trucks all my life, but do you think they would let me go to trucks? So when I was getting out I thought, "Why should I go back in the motor pool when I wanted to go in there before and they wouldn't let me." And so I said, "No way I'll stay."

RM: They used you because you spoke Italian?

JB: Yes.

RM: Did you speak Italian in your home?

JB: Well, my mother and my father did. And all of us knew Italian.

RM: So when you communicated with your mother it was in Italian?

JB: Well, at first, but then she learned English. In fact, she learned it faster than we learned Italian. But we all knew Italian. In Rome I was an interpreter there for about 6 or 8 months.

RM: Did you find yourself in any interesting situations when you were interpreting?

JB: [chuckles] Yes, there were quite a few. But at night you'd go home with your head loaded about that big, from all the sad tales that they'd tell of different things that went on and different things that . . . you really didn't even want to hear them if you could help it but you had to.

RM: Kind of the tragedies of war, then?

JB: Yes. You had to write them down and put them in English. It was all right but . . . well, of course it was better than the front lines.
[laughs]

RM: Really. And what did you do after you got out of the war?

JB: Well, I tried to go back in my old business. I had quite a bit of equipment I'd left, and when I tried to get deferred they didn't care

less whether I sold my equipment or not. So when I went to the army my brother kind of disposed of some of it. Then when I came back I still had a few pieces and I tried to go back in the trucking business. I did for a while, but then things were getting pretty tough - business was getting scarce. So then I went to work for wages for the county road department. And I spent my whole time - 26 years - there.

RM: And when did you go to work for them?

JB: It was '50-something. I retired in '81 and I had 26 years in.

RM: That'd be '55, then.

JB: Yes. So I went to work for the county because things were getting tough. Of course I had a family then - one kid, 2 kids, then 3 kids.

RM: Did you marry a local girl?

JB: No. She was from California.

RM: Between when you got out of the service and when you went to work for the county what did you do?

JB: Well, I had to go back into trucking and salvage what I had, but by then all the good stuff was gone. There wasn't too much left, so it was hard to make a living.

RM: There wasn't much mining either, was there?

JB: No. There was nothing and you could never get a contract. We moved houses and we did anything we were big enough to do, but we just couldn't make a living. It just wasn't there. So I finally went to work - and my brother did, too, for the county. He put in 20-some years and I put in about 26.

RM: What did you do for the road department?

JB: When I first went to work for them I was a grader operator. I worked for them for about 3 years and they made me a foreman, then I made

road superintendent and I worked right here all the time. I spent quite a few years as road superintendent.

RM: What all did the superintendent job entail?

JB: Well, you had to take care of all county roads. We had Beatty, Pahrum, Gabbs, Duckwater, Cherry Creek, and we had to take care of all the ins and outs. And at the time I went to work the county really never had anything. I think we had one loader and 2 dump trucks - and their house trailers were terrible.

As we went by we kept working up our trailers - got better trailers - better living conditions and better equipment. And we never had any truck transport, so I took an old F-8 truck, and took the dump box and made a truck tractor out of it, and got a semi . . . so we started building up. And then in later years we got end dumps and cats and loaders - when I left, they'd built up pretty well. Of course the money, too, wasn't there then. Equipment was high but it was in pretty good shape when I left there.

RM: And you were responsible for a vast area - the whole county - weren't you?

JB: That's right.

RM: And you were superintendent of that.

JB: Yes.

RM: Were any areas of the county particular headaches in terms of keeping the roads . . . ?

JB: They were all headaches. [laughter] You'd get gripes from every part of the county. I think the worst one was Sunnyside, because it was so far from here.

RM: Where is Sunnyside?

JB: Well, it's Cherry Creek - Adaven, Cherry Creek - it's on the east side of Nye County, right below Lund.

RM: OK. And that was a tough area?

JB: Well, it was so far from home and we used to get some bad winters. And then we'd have to push snow and we didn't have anybody over there. But finally, before I left I had it arranged so I had a guy right over there who would go out and push the snow, and we'd hire him. But it was hard to get an OK - you'd have to get an OK from the county commissioners. So it was hard. But in later years they finally relented - said, "Yeah, we'll hire that guy for this." And then I think toward the last we even sent a motor grader over there so every time it'd snow he could go out and get the road plowed. In fact, we had the motor grader over at Sunnyside and then I hired the guy who worked there and I left the grader right there and he would go out and do it. And then in the summertime he'd blade the roads.

When it snows here it's a problem to keep these county roads open. In fact, I can remember when some sheep got snowed in and we had to go out and get them out. It's always tough when you're out there living in the hills and your equipment might not start - you'd better be sure it can start or you're stranded.

RM: Did Bob Carp work for you?

JB: Yes.

RM: He plowed us out at Reveille when my dad was out there.

JB: Oh, he did?

RM: Yes. The first summer we were there - I think it was '54 - a terrible flash flood came down and washed out our mine road and he came out with the blade and fixed that road. He did quite a job.

JB: Well, a blade was about all they had at that time - and Frank Lee was the foreman then.

RM: Yes. My dad knew him - he was an old-time miner. How well did you know Frank?

JB: Real well. He used to be in the trucking business years ago around here. Then he went to Reno and what he did in Reno I really don't know. And then he came back here and worked for the county until he retired. He was their foreman for quite a few years.

RM: Is that right? He was there before you . . .

JB: Yes. He was there before me and then . . . in fact he was foreman and I kind of felt bad because they kind of didn't like the way he handled things so they made me foreman over him. And I hated that because Frank was a good guy.

RM: Sure. He was getting on in years, though, wasn't he.

JB: Yes, he was. He was going to retire then, anyway. I think Bob Carp kind of resented the fact that they made me foreman, because I was a newer man than he was. He worked for maybe 3 years after that and then he retired. So I carried on.

RM: You had a station out at Rattlesnake, didn't you?

JB: Yes. We finally got a station in Gabbs. We had a crew there - 2 men and the equipment. And then we had our crew here and of course we had our crew in Beatty and our crew in Pahrump. And we finally made a new station below Carrant. There was a radio station there that the army had and we got ahold of it. In fact they had it fenced in - they had a well there. I got ahold of it from them, then we made a station; it's still there. We had 2 men working there.

RM: But that'd be the one at Rattlesnake, right? We always called it

Rattlesnake. Do you know it by that name?

JB: Yes, Rattlesnake, but that's on this side. This is over close to Hot Creek and Orwell. I think you might be thinking of Blue Jay station.

RM: Oh, I'll bet it's a state highway station.

JB: Oh yes. That's right on the hill there. OK. In fact, they called it Rattlesnake Station. Now they've changed it to Bluejay and they moved it down 5 miles. They used to have a station out there at Diablo and they moved it up to Bluejay so now they have a 4-man crew to take care of Timpahute Road and other roads.

RM: Do you remember the old fellow who lived in a trailer? He was an old man in the '50s. I think his name was Tom Hurt - he lived right up there above Rattlesnake on the left-hand side of the road.

JB: Yes - Tom Hurt. He moved to Warm Springs.

RM: Oh, he did?

JB: Yes, and he took over Warm Springs for quite a few years.

RM: This was after the '50s?

JB: Oh yes. It was when I was working for the county.

RM: Is that right? I'll be darned. Because he was an old man then. My dad used to stop by and see him out there. I think he'd been an old miner or something, hadn't he?

JB: Yes. He moved to Warm Springs when they put that new building in. In fact, they moved that building from the airport here - that big, long building. And that's when Tom Hurt moved there. He ran the bar a little bit, but he was a pretty old man and he died.

You say your dad was at Reveille?

RM: Yes - from '54 to about '58. He was running the new Reveille Lead Mine and the Reveille Mill.

JB: And your name is what?

RM: Bob McCracken. His is the same.

JB: Well, McCracken . . . in fact, I hauled a load of lead ore out of Reveille for him clear to Salt Lake.

RM: Toelle [Utah].

JB: Yes.

RM: That was your truck that did that. I'll be damned. I always remember that. It was the summer of '54, I think - a load of concentrates.

JB: Yes, it was.

RM: Lead concentrates that you and he took clear to Toelle.

JB: Yes. You know the funny part? I loaded that up, and I was always cautious . . . I didn't have a way of telling how much I had on the truck, and I could only haul about 6 tons on that truck. So we loaded up and I kept saying, "Well, that's pretty good."

And [he'd say], "Well, I just got a little bit more. I got a little bit more."

I said, "Well, it's pretty heavy." So we took off. I drove all night, but as I got in those hills I noticed going uphill it was pretty luggy, and then I'd go downhill and I'd have to take it easy. We finally got to Toelle that morning and we had 8 tons.

RM: You had 8 tons on that? [chuckles]

JB: Well, I could tell it wasn't handling right.

RM: That lead ore was heavy.

JB: And I thought, "It's a good thing they didn't stop me at the state line and weigh me out because I'd've had a fine that would never quit."

I was only allowed maybe 6, 6-1/2 tons, but I had 8 tons on there.

RM: Was that a single axle or a tandem axle?

JB: No, it was a single axle.

RM: It was a nice truck as I remember, though.

JB: That truck's still out there [Mr. Boni points to his yard] - it's got a boom on it right now.

RM: Is that right?

JB: See that truck out there?

RM: That's the truck?

JB: That's the truck. I had a dump box on it.

RM: Oh, I've got to take a picture of that.

JB: And that was the truck - it was a '51 truck. We bought that truck brand new.

RM: Is it a Chevy?

JB: Yes, a Chevrolet dump truck.

RM: Yes. And then you and the old man drove back and he got back that night, I think.

JB: Yes - the same day. You'd go all day. It was a tough go but we made it.

RM: I'll be damned.

JB: Oh, we used to do a lot of hauling of ore. We used to haul to McGill. And it used to gripe me - we'd go over there and we might get our ore from Gold Hill or anyplace. So we'd take it over there and they'd make us muck it off onto a little gondola. We didn't think that was very fair, so we got mad. We hauled from Manhattan, we hauled from Tonopah, we hauled from Round Mountain, we hauled from Golden Arrow, we hauled from anyplace. Finally we kind of got after them and he said, "Well, if you'll haul 10 tons in here we will give you a loading ramp."

So then we did. Of course, then they quit taking custom ore. But I used to sweat that. We used to go with 2 trucks - 5 tons in each one. And then think, to have to muck them on a gondola. We'd put it in the gondola and drive clear home.

RM: Oh boy.

JB: We'd go get our load again and drive. We were out day and night, trying to make a living. And it was a tough go. [chuckles]

RM: Did you have any trouble with your tires?

JB: No, we didn't have any trouble.

RM: My dad had us picking up rocks in the road going to Warm Springs for a couple of weeks so that people wouldn't wreck their tires out there.

JB: Yes, that was something.

RM: I'll be damned. Did you ever do any other hauling for my dad?

JB: No. I think that was the only time.

RM: Well I can tell you what you got for that. It was \$20 a ton.

[laughter] I remember that very well.

JB: You could hardly pay for the gas it took. [laughter]

You know, I had a fast one pulled on me once. Somebody cleaned up the old mill on the other side of Round Mountain. He was cleaning up tailings - some pretty good stuff - out of the mill. He said, "Will you haul this to McGill?"

So I said, "OK." I took off and took it to McGill and I dumped it there and came back and I kept waiting for my money, waiting for my money, waiting for my money. What we used to do is have the company just take the charges right out with the smelting charges and pay us. So I waited. Finally I said, "Hey, where's my money?"

"Oh," they said, "This certain guy" (I can't think of his name now),

wrote and told us . . . we got a letter right here stating that all the trucking charge is taken care of." He'd written to them right off the bat, and I never did get paid.

RM: Was getting paid a problem?

JB: Oh, yes. You know, it was a problem even in the wood business. As poor as we were doing, there were bills that we had outstanding that we couldn't get money for. And it used to make me mad. One story that I can remember distinctly - there was a barber over there by the name of Brooks. The snow was about 2 feet deep and he called down for a cord of wood. So I got right in, and took a cord of wood - [an amount] that I figured was a cord of wood - and took it up to him and dropped it off. So 2 days later he said, "I called the weight and measure man," and he said, "Boy, you didn't give me a cord of wood."

And I said, "Well man, you been burning on it for 2 days. What have you been burning? You never had wood when you called me." And he wanted to argue. So I didn't say anything. I just took my truck and went up and I just threw on what was left. Then he was mad.

RM: Is that right? He wanted more wood. He tried to stiff you for some wood.

JB: Well, what he wanted . . . yes, that's right. What he wanted me to do is rick it up and give him the right measurement. When you've got wood piled in a 4-by-8 [stack] and you've got it long and then you saw it up and then you tighten that up, you can't get as tight a net, or you give them too much wood. So actually, he figured that if he ricked this all off he was going to want a lot of wood and I was cheating him. Well, I was only getting, I think, \$12 a cord.

RM: Oh, boy.

JB: Now wasn't that something? I think of that now - to think that wood's \$110, \$120 - and I was getting \$10 to \$12. And I sold lots of wood for \$8 a cord.

Another thing going back in the wood business where I really got some smarts: I did a contract with John Connally down here and he wanted 50 tons of wood instead of 50 cords. Well, if I would have caught on and said, "Well, I'll give you 50 cord," I'd've been all right, but I didn't catch it. So it was 50 tons, and the wood I was getting was kind of a light pine. So I hauled wood and I hauled wood and I hauled wood. I finally finished my contract . . . but, boy, it was tough.

RM: But you didn't make anything?

JB: No. Because a ton and a cord are a lot different.

RM: What does a cord weigh, typically?

JB: Well, I think that you've either got a long ton or a short ton . . . I think a long ton is 2000 pounds, and so maybe it would be 24, so he was probably getting 400 pounds in every cord of wood that I [cut].

RM: So how much does a cord weigh?

JB: Well, it depends on what kind of wood you've got.

RM: Yes. Say pine.

JB: Well, if you've got good pine, I imagine that it would maybe go 24 or somewhere . . .

RM: 2400?

JB: Yes, but I was thinking that 2000 pounds is a ton. But I wasn't thinking tons, I was thinking of cords when he said he would contract 50 tons. He'd saw it up in little blocks, then he'd sell it for \$1 a sack or whatever so he made the money and I did the work. I'll never sell another wood on tons. It'll be by the rick or by the load or by the cord

- stacked.

RM: Do you still deal in wood?

JB: No, I quit that.

RM: Where did you get your wood?

JB: The same place that my dad did - Timber Hill.

RM: Where is Timber Hill?

JB: It would be kind of south of Manhattan. It's over in those hills.

Like when you come down and you hit 8A or whatever it is called now, you come back towards Tonopah. It's up there to the left.

JB: You know where the old maintenance station used to be?

RM: Not really.

JB: Well anyway, it was up Timber Hill.

RM: Is there still wood up there?

JB: Not much. There might be a little bit.

CHAPTER FOUR

RM: So you retired from the county road department in '81 - then what did you do?

JB: Well, I didn't do much. I just started to kind of work for myself. And then we bought a piece of property up in Washington state - 5 acres.

RM: Whereabouts?

JB: About 5 miles from the Columbia River.

Other Voice: A little place called Washougal.

RM: Do you like it up there?

JB: Well, in the summertime.

RM: Do you have a house there?

JB: A double-wide trailer house. I sold a couple of claims in Manhattan that I had, so I was doing pretty well after I retired, so we bought the property. It's enjoyable.

RM: You mentioned that you have some property in Pahrump, too.

JB: Yes. I've got an acre that I never did develop because I'm kind of afraid of a lot of pilfering going on if you're not around. And then I've got 10 acres in Pahrump where I am going to try to make a gravel pit. I've got a surveyor now to find out how much strength the BLM has got against me. If I get all rights, I'll go ahead and make a gravel pit. If I don't, then I'll go a different route.

RM: Don't you also have a place down in Pahrump?

OV: We've got a fifth wheel down there.

JB: Yes, I've got a fifth wheel that's on my brother's place.

RM: Do you spend a lot of time in Pahrump?

JB: Oh, a month or two is about all.

RM: Do you go down for weekends?

JB: No. We just go down and stay for maybe a month or two. But this year we haven't been getting out. I've got so many things around here to do that I never got down there. We keep postponing. We were going to go for the holidays. Then we can't go, so we'll go after the holidays. So now my wife has an appointment the 15th, 16th, so we can't go till after the 16th. So we'll probably go down for a couple of weeks.

RM: Do you have children?

JB: They're all grown.

RM: Do they live in the area?

JB: Oh yes. They're all here. My second-oldest son works for the power company and my third son works for Ketten. My oldest son was in a car accident. Then my daughter works for Round Mountain Gold - she's been there for 11 years now. Then my youngest boy works for the state highway.

RM: I see. Speaking of power, where did Manhattan get its power when you were growing up there?

JB: They had a line that came in from southern California. In fact the company was a southern California company - they called themselves California Electric Power Company. Then they were sold to Edison. And then Edison sold it and then it just went to Sierra Pacific Power Company. So they were coming from California.

RM: Did that power come off of Bishop Creek?

JB: No, it came right out of California. In fact the line ran right over the White Mountains and in through California. So it wasn't from Bishop Creek, it was below.

RM: Was it hydroelectric, do you know?

JB: I don't know how they produced it over there.

RM: Did that line come through Tonopah?

JB: No. It came through Millers, then it went up to Manhattan and then from Millers it came up here [to Tonopah]. Now they've got a lot of power sources coming from all angles. At that time there was only one power source and we had a lot of power outages in Manhattan.

RM: And then did the power go from Manhattan on to Round Mountain?

JB: Well - yes, that's right. In fact they did have Manhattan right to Round Mountain, and then after the dredge went out they had a substation down below and then it went to Round Mountain. Now, I guess, they've got it clear up to the end of Smoky Valley - clear to the tavern.

RM: Where did you get your water?

JB: We had a well up on the Tonopah Road and that's where most of our water came from. It was kind of a hard water but we got by with it.

RM: Was there a local water company that took care of that, or how did that work?

JB: Well, there was kind of a company. They used to go up and pump about twice a day. The water well would make maybe 500 gallons so then he'd go up and pump for hour or so and fill the tank reservoir. And then maybe he'd go back at 2:00 and pump again. And maybe he'd go back early in the morning and pump again and that way the water that they pumped is what they used.

They had a family (the Franciscos) that was running it and then in later years a guy by the name of Jack Lashley came by and bought the water company. He ran it for a good many years until things went down to nothing, then he sold it to this John Roger and he ran it till it just went to nothing, and he just quit.

RM: What was the water company originally called, do you know?

JB: Well really, it didn't have a name.

RM: There were lines in the street though?

JB: Oh yes, they had the main lines. In fact, Francisco ran the water company for a long time. There was probably somebody before who put the water in. That's one thing I really don't remember.

RM: Did they have indoor toilets then?

JB: Some did, most of them didn't.

RM: Most of them were outhouses?

JB: That's right.

RM: So the people that had indoor toilets were probably a little more on the upscale.

JB: That's right - had a little more money. But there were darn few inside toilets. It was all outhouses.

RM: What kind of a house did you live in? Did you live in the same house all your life when you were growing up?

JB: Yes. In fact the house is still standing, parts of it. I've got a picture of it someplace. I took a picture of the house. It's kind of dilapidated and it's starting to fall down, but it is still there. And I took a picture of the church and of the school. I want to combine them into a picture on a saw. See how that picture is up there? And there's a party that will do them for me.

I think my father lived in 3 places when he was there. He moved from up at the Tonopah Road - he had a house up there - and then he moved down by where the school is now. Then there was kind of a conflict with the kids and the housing, so he made a trade and bought the house up on the hill. I think it used to belong to Barker - the old Barker house.

He bought that and then that's where we stayed most of the time.

RM: You didn't each have your own room or anything like that with 9 kids, did you?

JB: Well, no. [chuckles] I can remember clearly . . . in the wintertime it was cold and we also had what they call a tent house. You made a tent house, and then they kept putting boards on and pretty soon they put a roof on it. When they made that house the cracks in the floor were about that thick.

RM: About a half-inch wide, or three-eighths.

JB: Yes. And we'd build a fire, and that tent house is where 4 of my brothers stayed. We'd go over there and go to bed. We'd light the fire and then we'd sleep, then in the morning we'd get up and my mother and my dad would have the fire going in the house, or they'd have the kitchen stove a-going. So we'd run over there and get warm. It was cold sometimes over there too. I can still remember that. The shack is all torn down now. Then as the kids got bigger and some left, we kind of moved more into the house.

RM: What churches were there in town when you were growing up?

JB: Well, there's the Catholic church, which is still over there. And then they kind of had a Sunday school church up Erie Street, but they moved that; that was a little before my time. I imagine they had people coming in who would hold church services there, but really I could not say. I know the Catholic church was pretty prominent.

RM: Was it a pretty large congregation?

JB: Not that I can remember. It was just a few people going to church . . .

RM: Did you have a priest that lived there?

JB: No. I think he came from Tonopah. I don't think we ever had one that stayed there.

RM: What was the church called, do you remember?

JB: Just the Catholic church. And it's still existing. They kind of rebuilt it and made it historical.

RM: Were there any community organizations or anything that you remember, like clubs or . . .

JB: Well, I think there might have been something like the Odd Fellows or some of those and some of the people who joined them used to come to town to the meetings. Really, I don't think they even had a lodge over there.

RM: Did you know Bill Thomas very well?

JB: Yes, very well.

RM: Would you tell me about him, what you remember about him?

JB: He was a pretty good sheriff. He was real calm, and I don't think he ever packed a gun. He was just calm enough that he usually talked a guy out of something. And I thought he was a real good guy.

RM: Did you know much about his personal life? Did he have kids or anything like that?

JB: I never knew if he ever had a kid. I knew his wife casually, but I knew him pretty well. He was an easy-going guy and he always worked his self out of his predicaments. He used to come to Manhattan. It was a funny thing. We had a big family, and every time somebody'd steal a beef, they'd say, "Well, Boni's got a big family. They could be the culprits." So of course Thomas would come out, and look things over and see if he could find some evidence. He was always good-natured about it. But they always kind of had us on the carpet.

RM: Because of all those kids?

JB: That's right. So how'd you make a living for those kids? I can remember distinctly every once in a while, when they had the constable - they had a constable in Manhattan - he used to come up and kind of accuse us of things that we didn't do. It was kind of funny.

RM: Did you have the biggest family in town?

JB: Well, Bracketts had quite a family. I can't count how many kids unless I stop and think, but they were a pretty big family. The Franciscos were not too big a family - they had about, I think, 4. I really can't think of anybody there who was larger than our family.

RM: Who was the constable?

JB: St. Clair Woods was the constable for a while and then John Sullivan was. John Sullivan was from an old family there. They had 2 kids and the mother and the dad. He was constable for a long time. And then Bill Roberts was constable for quite a while.

RM: Were they under the jurisdiction of the Nye County Sheriff?

JB: Oh yes. And then Byron Wilson was constable for a while.

RM: How was the constable chosen? Was he just appointed by Bill Thomas?

JB: Yes, he was appointed. Charlie Humphrey was the J.P. for a long time over there.

RM: Was he elected?

JB: I can't remember if he was elected or appointed. I can't remember any elections until I started to vote.

RM: Was there a brothel in Manhattan?

JB: Oh yes; there were 3 of them. They were all down at the end of town.

RM: What were they called?

JB: Well, they just called it the red-light district and . . .

RM: Each one of them didn't have a name?

JB: No. Everybody was known personally. There was . . . Pearl Linders was the first house. And then the second one was Marie St. Clair. And then the lower house . . . in fact, I moved her to Fallon after things got kind of quiet. The one who was in the lower house - Ella Clark - was there for a long time.

RM: Were they kind of named after the madam?

JB: Well, I kind of think so. You know, they'd say, "Down at Pearl's or down at Ella's."

RM: The town was big enough to support 3 brothels?

JB: Well, there were some pretty good times there when the guys were working, and there was always money floating around.

RM: Was this before they raised the price of gold?

JB: It was \$35 gold. That's just sickening too. I thought I'd take a little placer mining on. So we had a pretty good little spot, and we got a little equipment together - that was when we were still in the trucking business. We got a gravel plant and had a truck and we had a little power shovel. We went down and started digging and we had to put pumps in, and everything's run by gas, of course. So we started digging. Well, the first day we made an ounce of gold. That was pretty good. We figured if we made an ounce in those days, we could get by. So about the second day, we didn't make any ounce. And we kept pouring gas in the pump, pouring gas in the truck, pouring gas in the shovel, and it kept getting less and less - three-fourths of an ounce and half an ounce . . . it finally got down so we just couldn't go - and we had to fold her up. So that ended our placer mining. In fact, you don't get \$35 an ounce

when gold is at \$35. It depends on the fineness.

RM: What was the fine of your gold?

JB: Well, 600. So we'd get about \$22. You'd send it to the smelter and it'd come back and say, "Well, there was so much silver in it and so much gold at 60 percent fineness," and they'd give you a check for \$250. It was just sickening, to think you'd worked hard for \$200 in those days.

RM: You bet. Most of the placer mines weren't open pit, were they? They were shafts drifting on bedrock.

JB: That's right.

RM: That ground stood really well, then.

JB: In some places. There were a few people who got killed underground where it caved in. But it stayed pretty good. And each one had its own shaker screen and a sluicebox, and there was pond water. When there wasn't water they couldn't work the placer very well, but where there was water they could do pretty well. And there were some rich spots and some of those leasers made some pretty good money over there.

RM: But the values were on bedrock. They weren't in strata on the way down?

JB: Well, technically they could . . . they'd get some above, maybe a foot above or 2 feet above bedrock. Or you might get a ledge, right on top [where] the bedrock went in. Naturally the bedrock was always the cream. They'd go down in the shaft and work and maybe get out 2 yards or one yard, I don't know exactly how much. Then they'd screen it, wash it and sluice it that night so they knew what they had. And they always cleaned the first riffle. That's where all your best gold is. They'd go maybe a month before they cleaned 3 riffles. There was some good gold in Manhattan.

RM: How deep were the shafts typically?

JB: Well, I think the deepest shaft maybe was 80 feet. Bedrock might have been down 60, some 70, 80, 80, 90 - it varied. As you went down farther it got deeper as you came up in the shaft.

RM: Was there water on bedrock?

JB: Yes, there was water most of the time. In fact, right there in Manhattan we dug a cesspool hole, and we could get one color of gold on the bottom.

RM: Is that right?

JB: So right below Manhattan . . . there was water there too, in fact, before the dredge came in. Right below Manhattan there was water; you could get a little bit of water. There wasn't a tremendous amount but you could get enough water to water a few horses or . . .

RM: And then the dredge came in and worked where these old shafts had been?

JB: Oh, they just went through them. They started in the canyon and went from berm to berm.

RM: When the dredge came in, was it reaching down 100 feet?

JB: Yes. They started way down on the flat and made a big pond and they built these pontoons floating on water. Then they put a digging ladder in the middle, then of course they had their screens and everything inside, then on the end they had their 2 stackers.

RM: "Two stackers" means conveyers coming through.

JB: Conveyers out, stacking waste. So they'd screen all this stuff inside there. They'd take the coarse and separate it, then they'd run the other through the sluicibox. And the ladder was a digging ladder. It was up and down. I think it was an 80-foot ladder.

RM: Oh. So it was reaching down where . . .

JB: That's right. So they'd start on the top and they'd work down, and down. They were always working underwater. And they had, of course, depth gauges.

RM: So sometimes they were working clear down 80 feet on bedrock.

JB: Well, I think 80 feet was about as deep as they could go. They'd go as deep as they could and then, in some places, if it was too narrow they'd blast it and get through. There was only one place they couldn't get through. It was a pretty good digger - you looked at some of those buckets and . . . too bad you couldn't take a picture of one of those buckets. I think there's one over there yet, at George Long's place up there, unless somebody took it for scrap. I think it was about a quarter of a yard. It had digging teeth. You could hear that thing just squeal and grind. In fact, they would get so much that sometimes the stackers were dragging so they'd have to go there with cats and pull the thing away when they were digging deep. When they were digging shallow they could dispose of their material.

RM: Jim, have you thought of any people there in Manhattan that we should mention?

JB: Well, I don't know.

RM: Characters or politicians or mine owners or operators or . . .

JB: Usually all the mine operators were out of Tonopah. There was Witenburg or Butler Mining Company or some of these other . . .

RM: Who owned the White Cap?

JB: There was some outfit - I think it was the White Cap Mining Company.

RM: OK. It wasn't a Tonopah outfit?

JB: No, there were a lot of stockholders.

RM: I see. How about the Reliance? Was it owned by a Tonopah company?

JB: It was a California outfit. Those 3 guys came from California and bought it. I worked there a little while; I did most of the hauling out of their bins. But I really didn't work too much around the mine. I worked top man a little bit, but I didn't like those mines.

RM: You didn't like working underground.

JB: No. I was down in the Gold Metals mine below there. But let me tell you a little story about that. They hired me as top man. So when they were sinking or whatever, if they wanted to timber, the top man would have to cut it for them. Or if they wanted a pipe you'd go get it for them. So the guy who was working down there - I think they were sinking the shaft and they wanted a certain timber - sent word up that he wanted a certain type of timber, a certain length, and I was trying to understand what he was talking about. He said, "Well, you come on down in the shaft."

"OK." I didn't want to go down but I did. I went down in the shaft and we went down maybe 100 feet or a little more. When I got out of the cage and looked up all I could see was a little hole about that big around. And I thought, "That's not for me."

So I went up and got what he wanted and . . . they just worked me a couple days and then I was laid off. Because things were real tight.

I can remember when we were around there, trying to make a living when we were kids. I think it was probably in '32 or so, right after the Depression, and there wasn't much doing so the WPA sent out a crew, and they could only hire one per family so my brother went to work. I couldn't go to work, but I wanted to. Anything you got naturally went right back into your family to keep things going.

RM: Is that kind of what you remember - things being tough all through there?

JB: As they say, the biscuits were flying high. [laughter] No, it wasn't an easy life. But we all worked. That's why I think we got wood and did things like that. In fact, when we were kids we had a spring wagon, as they called it, that you used to pull with a horse. We took the tongue off and we kids used to go out and get the scrap pine wood that was out back there by Round Rock. We'd get it and take it down the line [the brothel area] and usually sell it to the women. But they were particular - they wanted big wood, they didn't want any little scrap. But we used to try to sell them for \$1 or something.

RM: Is that right? Just to make a little something.

JB: Yes. And then we'd pick up a few bottles or something that were redeemable. And when the bakery shop was going, we'd get 2 of those rolls for a nickel. We'd get 10 cents to get a couple rolls. And then we'd go in and try to con the old man that cooked - old Schragel. He was pretty sly - but he was pretty good, too. We'd get a couple rolls, then we'd sit outside and eat them. It wasn't too prosperous. [chuckles]

RM: Were there a lot of bootleggers there?

JB: Oh yes.

RM: Were the people making whiskey?

JB: Sure.

RM: When your dad made wine, he made it for his own consumption, didn't he?

JB: Yes; he never sold any. But there were a lot of bootleggers around there. In fact they'd go out to these little places like out at Barker Creek and various places and they'd get a still a-going. And then they'd

peddle their liquor and whatever in town or Round Mountain or anyplace. The Pro-His were always after them. There was one particular guy who stands out - his name was Matt McGrandy. He used to make wine and he made a little liquor. And the Pro-His were always after him. In fact, he had to go to Carson once.

RM: To do a little time?

JB: Yes, but he got out of it. My brother hauled them; there were 5 of them who got caught. They took them all to Carson and they had their hearing, and I think they turned them all loose. But they took his wine, and he had it all in barrels, and his whiskey. They rolled it out and dumped it over the hill. Man, they took picks and broke those barrels and the wine ran down the hill. [laughs]

RM: You were too young to have known Jack Longstreet, weren't you?

JB: Well, I've heard about him. Ed Hughes was a pretty good friend of mine, and he knew Jack Longstreet real well. And the story he told me . . . you know he had one ear off?

RM: Cattle rustling, wasn't it?

JB: Horse thief. So this Ed Hughes told me about him and said he was a pretty tough guy. He told me a story once about Longstreet - that they were out camped someplace - and they always packed guns. The guys were sleeping and pretty soon he heard a BOOM! and he swore to God that Longstreet was trying to kill him. He said, "No, I shot that rattlesnake that was crawling by your bed there." [laughs] I really never did know him. I might have seen him; I can remember a few things about him.

There were ranches out there - like when Skuffy had Skuffy Ranch by Pine Creek, when Pine Creek was going. I worked for \$1 a day over at Pine Creek haying when I was a young kid. I did a lot of hard work just

to keep things going. I worked for Trudgen at their ranch.

CHAPTER FIVE

RM: OK, Jim. You said you had spent some time around Pine Creek, and up in there. Would you just name some of the ranches up there and where they were located?

JB: Well, the Hunts Canyon Ranch still is. In fact, there were 2 ranches there, and one was owned by Trudgen. The way she got her start . . . she had this place over by Maggie Blue's, and she started with 2 cows and a calf and she just kept building up and building up. Finally she got enough to buy the upper ranch and Hunt's Canyon and then she went into the cattle business and did pretty well.

And then the lower ranch was owned by Jim Marsh - I think his first name was Jim - and he did pretty well. He was kind of in politics, but I don't know if he held any office.

And then course, there was Charlie Keough - he was foreman for United Cattle and he worked for them.

And then Skuffy had a ranch right about 10 miles north of Pine Creek, which is combined now.

So we'd work at Pine Creek - put the hay up - and then we'd go to Skuffy's and put their hay up. And this was all \$1 a day and your board. And then sometimes we'd go to Hunt's Canyon and maybe help them do a little bit of roundup work. I even rode as cowboy for a while chasing cows and rounding up. So we were always through Belmont.

RM: What was happening at Belmont?

JB: Well, really nothing. There was just Lee Brotherton. He had a house, he and his wife Pauline and their son Frank (who was raised there). Then there were Jim Hughes and Ed Hughes and George Hughes and

they just lived there and worked in ranching - Ed Hughes worked on these ranches cowboying and haying, and I imagine George and Jim had worked there, too. And then there was another ranch, the Stone House, which is still in existence; it belonged to Albert and Mayme Hooper. And he worked at Pine Creek with us when he was a younger fellow.

RM: And that was when United Cattle had it?

JB: Yes. Then I guess Keough ran the place, and he ran it for a good many years. I think he was kind of related to the United Cattle people - I think his sister or something married one of the United Cattle guys. Keough of course then went back to Peavine and bought that place.

RM: What was happening at Peavine when you were growing up? Your dad had had the lease there, didn't he?

JB: Yes. There was really nothing. It was real bad. I think the banks had most of those things tied up. I think it was leased, but I think it was leased from the bank. After he quit (his partner's name was Frank Bernard), I think the Bertolinos went in there and bought, or somebody else bought before they did, and then the Bertolinos bought and they started raising cattle and did pretty well.

RM: Were most of these ranches small operations?

JB: Well, yes, but they always ran maybe 100 head of cows and had an open range. That's the only way they could make it. And they'd raise enough hay to feed them.

I'll tell you an incident in Belmont. They had a big dance there when I was pretty young, and they hired Millie Acree and her band. The Hogans (they had a big hotel in Austin, and I think there were 3 brothers) came to the dance. Eldred Moore was over there and he was a young fellow, and tough, and always wanting to fight. [chuckles] So

this dance was going real good and pretty soon a big beef started, so the Hogans and Eldred Moore were out there fighting. And, man, they fought and . . . boy, they were tough. I can remember that really distinctly, and I guess none of them won. Of course, nobody ever wins a fight.

[laughs]

RM: Yes, right.

JB: They were really fighting. We used to have some good times there. We'd have a dance now and then. And then later on they had a 100-year centennial at Belmont. So then they had another dance, and it was nice. In fact, they gave me a certificate for being such a good citizen and helping them out. [chuckles] There was a big crowd. They had a dance and had a kitchen set up, and a barbecue, and it was real good. That was in later years, of course. But I can remember Belmont because we used to always come over the hill and stop at the spring - everybody would gather at the spring and start talking. They had a water tank by the road.

RM: Oh, in Belmont?

JB: Yes, off to the left . . . In the summertime the pipe runs full and in the wintertime it gets down to nothing.

RM: You went over to Belmont a lot, then?

JB: Yes. We'd go over the hill, and we'd go fishing sometimes or hunting. But I was in Belmont quite a bit.

RM: Were there a lot of people living there in the '20s and '30s?

JB: I guess there were in the early days, but I can't remember too many people.

RM: Was it almost a ghost town when you were growing up?

JB: Yes. By then the county seat had been moved out and so there wasn't really much doing. There were just a few guys who lived there.

RM: Do you remember any business establishments there?

JB: Well, when I was a kid and we used to go through there to get some hay they had the Cosmopolitan. It was kind of a saloon and a bar and sold a little candy, and stuff like that. That's the only place that I can remember that was in business. In fact that was the only one.

RM: Do you remember who ran it?

JB: Well, different people ran it. [In the early days of Belmont] Charles Goldback used to own and run the bar there. But at the time I was there it wasn't Charlie Goldback. He was from a Manhattan family - he had 4 kids that he raised in Manhattan. But at that time I don't know who was running it. You know how it is, those guys come and go. They'd run it for a month or two and they couldn't make, it so somebody else'd take over.

RM: Sure.

JB: Manhattan was kind of the same way.

RM: Yes. What would you describe as the heydays of Manhattan?

JB: Well, I don't know. I guess the heydays of Manhattan were in the early days when they had a prosperous business and they had the 2-story buildings. They used to have the Santos Building - it used to be a hotel. It was a 2-story tin building. And then across the street - in fact the cellar's still there - I think Santos (the family, what's left of them, is in Reno) had a big 2-story bar and an eating house, and there were some pretty nice places. I don't really remember them too well from that time - the only time I can remember when Manhattan was roaring pretty good was when the leasers were placering; money was flowing pretty well. I used to always hang around the garage and help my brother selling gas; and he did mechanic work and he used to be in contact [with

the leasers]. Things were going pretty well then.

I don't know, maybe a lot of people think when the dredge was there it was a good time, but I don't think it was too good because they had a limited supply [of workers], and a lot of the men didn't come from Manhattan, they came from outside.

RM: Now, where did the dredge company come from?

JB: Well, Natomas is a California outfit, but they're all over. But there were still some other companies that were in with them.

At one time a cloudburst came down through Manhattan and I think it took half of the town out. And they had 2 big fires. It seemed like every time they'd have a fire it would wipe out one block. That's really what hurt Manhattan, but then Manhattan always stayed kind of small - it never got really big.

[Tape is turned off for a while]

RM: Now, Jim, you were talking about that trip you made from Reveille to Toelle.

JB: Well, we left there in the afternoon after we got loaded, thinking that I had a nice light load. We kept going and we drove all night and I could tell that the truck was pretty heavy because when I'd get to the hills I'd have to get down in the lower gears, and going downhill I'd have to hold it back.

I think we got there at about 4:00 in the morning. I don't think the place was really opened up yet, so we slept in the truck a little while, till maybe 6:00. We finally got ahold of somebody and I said, "Well, where can I get rid of these concentrates?"

So he said, "We'll dump right here." That was one good thing about it - they at least let you dump. So we dumped it on the cement platform.

And he put his stake in it with writing on it, and then we took off and we drove again all day. I can't remember exactly when, but we got back home sometime that evening.

RM: Did the old man [McCracken] help you drive back?

JB: No, I did all the driving. In those days I could travel all night and half the day. But now the lights coming at me kind of bug me, but I can still drive most of the night. In fact I told my wife last night, "Those moonlight nights, I love to drive all night long." So we finally got home that afternoon.

But that was the story of my life. I used to go out and pick up ore here and there . . . in fact, if we had 30 tons of ore to haul we'd go and pick it up, come here, maybe get a few hours' sleep, leave at 4:00 in the morning, head for McGill, get over there and unload and come back home. And sometimes we'd haul coal back and if it was on that end we would go around and load and then come here and stop, and if it was on this end we'd go home and stay and then go and get our load and go again.

RM: How in the world do you remember that incident with my dad, though?

JB: Well, I remember that Bob McCracken was working at the mine. And I graded the road for him several times after that. And then he finally quit.

RM: In the winter of '54-'55 or '55-'56, there was terrible snow out there and somebody had to come out and get him in the grader. Was that you?

JB: Yes.

RM: I'll be damned!

JB: That was the year that I went to work, and it was really funny. I went to work the first of January of '55 and we had a motor grader in

Warm Springs so we went and got it and brought it in here and we had to service it. So the first couple of days I serviced the motor grader then, and it snowed. And it snowed and it snowed. So then we were all over. We got everybody out and we went over to Reveille and Bob Carp and Frank Lee went up past Moore's Station and got a band of sheep that were snowed in. Then we came back and they sent us to Gabbs because we had to go clear to Ione through dirt road. So we went through there and then we got just about from Ione to Gabbs, at Burned Cabin Summit. We got up there and there was a snow drift that was 10 feet deep, I bet, and we couldn't go any farther. We came back and went around and below and went around the other way and then came back and they moved, so then we hauled gravel for a couple of months.

RM: Did you stay in a trailer at Fallinis' when you were grading roads?

JB: Yes. Most of the time we camped there at Fallinis'. We had a trailer and it was tough, because it was cold. And man, you'd try to keep warm. You were always hoping that your equipment would start and you wouldn't be stranded.

RM: The old man said he was wondering how in the hell he was going to get out of there, and you came in with the grader and he followed you out.

JB: Yes, usually that's what we did. I can remember an instance when we went to Tybo: There was a guy who was in Tybo for a good many years - you ought to know him. But anyway, he was up there with his wife and she was pregnant. We knew that, and we had to go in there and we were fighting the road to Hot Creek and up to Tybo, and we finally got in there. I told him, "You come out with us. Don't you wait." Because we had had an instance where we went in and got somebody and they said,

"We'll wait till morning." Well, in the morning it was blowing and drifting snow. So we said, "You follow us right out," because she was pregnant. But they were glad to see us. Also the old man who lived over at Keystone; we went and got him but he wouldn't come out . . . so if that's the case, hey, stay there.

RM: Yes. If that's what he wants. I think my dad knew he wasn't going to be working out there at Reveille for a while, so he went to work at Timpahute.

JB: In fact we hauled to Timpahute - from Northumberland. They were tearing Northumberland down and building Timpahute.

RM: Oh, that road at Timpahute - wasn't that a horrible road?

JB: Oh man. We would drop in dust holes and we'd go maybe for a mile and when we'd come out maybe we'd have stone-bruised tires from hitting a big rock. Or maybe the dust was just a-boiling all over. It was terrible.

RM: I'll bet you broke all kinds of tires on that.

JB: Quite a few of them.

RM: That was one of the worst washboard roads I've ever seen.

JB: Yes, it was a tough road. That's when I was trying to make a living; I went to work for the county right after that. Timpahute was going pretty good at that time.

RM: What does that kind of dust do to a truck? Does it just ruin it?

JB: Yes. You know what I saw happen? On this side over here at Cloverdale there was an incident like that. This kid who was working for me went through a dust pile and he went on for a couple of miles and it just clogged up in there and mudded up and blocked him up tight. That dust was just awful.

RM: Does the dust get in your engine and in the moving parts?

JB: It gets in your clutch. In those old, old cars the clutch had a tin plate. It got into your clutch and sure, if it goes through the breather it'll clog her up tight.

RM: And then wear your valves and your rings and everything.

JB: Yes, that dust just sucks in through the air cleaner.

RM: But you always did all your own mechanic work, didn't you?

JB: Oh yes. We did all the servicing and all the mechanic work, and that's tough too. That was the trouble. We'd try to work and haul this stuff and then come back and fix tires and keep things a-going and keep the trucks a-running.

RM: So when you started working for the county you dispersed some of your equipment?

JB: Well, yes. In fact I've still got some left. And maybe once in a while we'd move a house for ourself or something. I even started hauling mail to try to make a living before I went to work for the county. In fact I had the contract . . . when they took the railroad out of Tonopah I hauled from Mina to Tonopah and to Goldfield. I hauled for about 8 months. And that was another thing that got me. The stage line - Micalich Stage Line - was working here. The service came up for bid, so I bid on it, because I was into it so deep I thought I should bid it again; I had bought a new truck. I was 8 months into it and I thought if I got it again I could go for another couple of years. I put my bid in, and I was low bid, but he some way got to the inspector in San Francisco and they wouldn't bond me.

RM: What was their excuse for not bonding you?

JB: I didn't have enough collateral, I guess. I didn't have enough

clout. [chuckles] Naismith then was running the bonding company and I was real mad and I said, "How come that bond didn't go through?" and he gave some kind of excuse, and he had more power than I did. So naturally he got to run with his bus line and then he'd haul mail and he could still haul his passengers.

That was about the time that Bill Beko's father was hauling mail to Manhattan from Round Mountain. When he died, Bill didn't know what to do with it - he had somebody working for him. So I told Bill, "I'll buy it," and I bought his rights out. I hauled mail there for about a year and that's about the time Micalich was in there and he was going to put a line through soon. About that time I was kind of fed up with the federal government because they were so cheap. So I said, "OK. I'll run this route and run it out, and then I don't want to bid any more. 'Cause if I bid, I'm going to bid it enough that I'm going make money 'cause I'm not going to wear out tires and trucks just for them." And you'd fight Public Service - you'd have to have interstate rights and you'd have to go through them. That's the only way you could haul freight. And that's where your extra money came in. The mail wasn't too much, but you had to be really on the ball.

So I told the postmaster - Ed Slavin - one day (we always knew when the inspector was coming), "Well, the inspector's here," he said.

"I'm going to fix that guy. He's not going to ride for free." I said, "That's how I'm making my living."

And I don't know what happened. I don't think he went out, but he did give me heck about first-class mail. I used to always take the first-class pouches. I wanted to be secure, and I figured if they were in the front seat they'd be secure. "No way," he said. "You throw them

in the back of that truck."

And I said, "Amongst all those bags?"

"Oh yeah." He said, "If somebody held you up, they couldn't find them."

I said, "They'll find them if they want them. I think it's safer here than up there." But what do you say? So I told Slavin, "If that man ever comes out again and wants to ride to Manhattan and Round Mountain with me, he's going to pay his freight. He's not going to ride free." But he never did come back and ride with me any more. And I didn't have it. But I figured, "I'll get some money out of him and I'll make my way." But he was a tough goat.

RM: Did you know O. K. Reed or Ed Reed?

JB: Yes, a little bit. I know he had that son, Little O. K. Every time they'd get a bunch of mustangs, the little kid was right in there amongst them. You thought, "Well he'd going to get killed," but no way. He was right in amongst those horses and never once did he get trampled. But the kids are raised that way.

RM: Yes. They know how to do it, don't they?

JB: They used to have some beautiful horses out there. I used to always remember when we'd haul ore out of Golden Arrow, we'd leave here early in the morning and go out there and pick up ore, maybe silver or gold, from leasers. And we'd go up the valley and in the morning you'd see bands of mustangs - maybe 10 head and a stallion with them. And then you'd go a little further and you'd see another 10 head and a stallion. It was beautiful! And the sun was coming up. I can remember that very distinctly - it just stays in my mind, how nice it was. Now you go out there and you don't see anything - maybe a few antelope . . .

Acree, Millie, 9, 61
 Adaven, NV, 36
 Africa, 31
 Amalgamated Mine, 13
 atomic bomb, 31
 Austin, NV, 9
 Barker Creek, NV, 57
 Barker family, 48-49
 Battle Mountain, NV, 22
 Baxter Spring, NV, 5
 Beatty, NV, 18, 35, 37
 Beko, Bill, 69
 Beko, Pete, 69
 Belmont, NV, 60, 61-63
 Bernard, Frank, 2, 61
 Bertolino family, 61
 Big Pine Mine, 3
 Blue Jay Station, 38
 Boni, Albino, 4
 Boni, Dominica Gensi "Minny," 1-2,
 4, 7, 25, 26-29, 30, 33
 Boni, Ermand, 4
 Boni, Irene, 4, 18
 Boni, Kal, 46
 Boni, Kalvin, 46
 Boni, Kathleen, 46
 Boni, Keith, 46
 Boni, Leo, 4
 Boni, Marjorie Louise, 34, 46
 Boni, Mary, 4, 18
 Boni, Pietro "Pete," 1-7, 14, 18,
 27-28, 30, 44, 48, 57, 61
 Boni, Pete Jr., 4, 16
 Boni, Rosie, 4, 18
 Boni, Val, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10-11, 14,
 16, 17, 19, 23-24
 Boni family, 18, 27-29, 48-49,
 50-51, 56-57
 bootlegging, 57-58
 Bozich, Nick, 3
 Brackett, Tony, 19
 Brackett family, 19, 51
 Brooks, Mr., 42
 brothels, 51-52, 57
 Brotherton, Frank, 60
 Brotherton, Lee & Pauline, 60
 Bulldog Mine, 3
 Burned Cabin Summit, 66
 businesses, 18-20, 63
 Butler Mining Company, 55
 California Electric Power Co., 46
 Camp Roberts, CA, 30
 Carp, Bob, 36-37, 66
 Carson City, NV, 15
 Catholic Church, 49-50
 cave-ins, 3, 53
 Central Mine, 3
 Central Nevada Museum, 21
 Cherry Creek, NV, 35, 36
 childhood, 9
 Clark, Ella, 52
 Connally, John, 43
 Consolidated Mine & Mill, 13
 Cosmopolitan Saloon, 63
 Cowden, Joe, 10, 16
 Currant, NV, 37
 dances, 9, 61-62
 Darrough's Hot Springs, 9
 Depression, 56-57
 dredge, 12, 21-23, 47, 54-55, 64
 Duckwater, NV, 35
 Edison Power Co., 46
 electricity, 46-47
 England, 31
 Fallini ranch, 66
 Ferig, Mrs., 19
 fires, 20, 64
 floods, 20, 36, 64
 food, 18, 27
 Fort Dix, NJ, 31
 France, 31, 32
 Francisco, Joe, 16
 Francisco family, 19, 47-48, 51
 Gabbs, NV, 35, 37
 garden, 18
 gold, 1-2, 10, 21, 52-53, 54, 70
 Gold Metals mine, 12, 56
 Goldback, Charles, 63
 Golden Arrow, NV, 40, 70
 Goldfield, NV, 68
 Hawthorne, NV, 2
 health care, 5, 16, 23-27
 Hogan family, 61-62
 Hooper, Albert & Mayme, 61
 Hot Creek, NV, 38
 Hughes, Ed, 58, 60-61
 Hughes, George, 60-61
 Hughes, Jim, 60-61
 Humphrey, Charlie, 51
 Hunts Canyon Ranch, 60
 Hurt, Tom, 38
 Hyde, Emerson, 13
 Indians, 2
 Italian language, 33

Italian people, 30
 Italy, 1-2, 27-28, 31
 Japan, 31
 Johnson, Antone, 10
 Kane, Matt, 10
 Kaulburner, Herman, 18
 Keough, Charlie, 60, 61
 * Ketten Co., 46
 Lashley, Jack, 47
 law enforcement, 50-51
 leasing, 3, 4, 8, 11-12, 13, 53,
 63-64, 70
 Lee, Frank, 37, 66
 lifestyle, 9, 17-18
 Linders, Pearl, 52
 Long, George, 55
 Longstreet, Jack, 58
 Maggie Blue's, NV, 60
 mail, 15, 16, 18-19, 68-70
 Manhattan, NV, 1-3, 4, 5, 7-9, 12,
 13, 14-15, 16, 18-21, 22-26, 28,
 29, 40, 46-55, 58, 63-64, 69-70
 Manhattan mill, 21
 Mannington Trucking, 11
 Marsh, Jim, 60
 McCracken, Robert G., 36-37, 38-39,
 41, 65, 66, 67
 McGill, NV, 40, 65
 McGrandy, Matt, 58
 Micalich Stage Line, 68-69
 military police, 32
 Millers, NV, 47
 Mina, NV, 68
 miniature gold course, 17
 mining, 1-2, 9-11, 12-13, 20-23, 28,
 52-56
 Mono, Italy, 1
 Moore, Eldred, 61-62
 Moores Station, NV, 66
 mules, 6
 Naismith, Mr., 69
 Natomas Dredging Co., 12, 23, 64
 Nevada State Highway Dept., 38, 46
 New Year's, 27
 Northumberland, NV, 67
 Nye County road department, 34-38,
 45, 65-66
 Odd Fellows, 50
 Orwell, NV, 38
 Pahrump, NV, 35, 37, 45-46
 Peavine Ranch, 2, 61
 Pine Creek, NV, 58, 60, 61
 Pipe Springs, NV, 24
 Pittsburgh, PA, 1, 28
 placer mining, 3, 4, 10, 11-12,
 21, 52-55, 63
 plumbing, 48
 prejudice, 30
 Pro-His, 58
 radio, 17, 37
 railroad, 11
 ranch work, 58-60
 Rattlesnake, NV, 37-38
 Red mill, 10, 21
 Reed, Ed, 70
 Reed, O. K., 70
 Reed, O. K. Jr., 70
 Reliance Mine, 9-11, 12, 21, 56
 Reno, NV, 37
 Reveille Lead mine & mill, 36,
 38-39, 66, 67
 Rippy, Mr., 19, 20
 road superintendent, 35-36
 Roberts, Betty Donahue, 8
 Roberts, Bill, 51
 Roger, John, 47
 Rome, Italy, 32
 Round Mountain, NV, 8, 9, 20, 25,
 40, 41, 47, 58, 69-70
 Round Mountain Mines Co., 46
 Rye Patch, NV, 14
 St. Clair, Marie, 52
 San Antone, NV, 16
 Santos Building, 63
 Santos family, 63
 schools, 5, 7-8, 13
 Schragel, Mr., 19, 57
 Seyler's Lake, 3, 16
 Sierra Pacific Power Co., 46
 Skuffy ranch, 58, 60
 Slate, Frank, 20
 Slaughterhouse, NV, 5
 Slavin, Ed, 69
 Smoky Valley, NV, 47
 snow, 15-16, 36, 42, 65-67
 Southworth, Mr., 19
 Spanish pack saddles, 6
 Spanish Springs, NV, 14, 23
 sports, 8
 Stone House ranch, 61
 Sullivan, Dan, 3
 Sullivan, John, 51
 Sullivan family, 51
 Sunnyside, NV, 35-36

Thomas, Sheriff & Mrs. Bill, 50
 Timber Hill, NV, 5, 44
 Timpahute, NV, 38, 67
 Toelle, UT, 39
 Tonopah, NV, 2, 5, 11, 14, 16, 25,
 29, 40, 68
 Tonopah Road, 3
 Treadwell Yukon mining operation, 5
 trucking business, 11, 13-15, 16,
 34, 37, 39-42, 52, 64-65, 67-70
 trucks, 14, 39-40, 67-68
 Trudgen, Mr., 59
 Trudgen, Mrs., 60
 Turner, Butch, 23-24
 Tybo, NV, 5-7, 14, 66
 United Cattle & Packing Co., 60, 61
 U.S. Army, 30-34
 U.S. Bureau of Land Management, 45
 U.S. Post Office, 18-19, 69-70
 U.S. Works Project Administration, 56
 Val's Garage, 7, 19, 63
 vegetables, 3
 Warm Springs, NV, 38, 41, 66
 Washougal, WA, 45
 water, 18, 47, 54-55
 water company, 47-48
 West, Ida, 19
 West, Mr., 16
 White Cap Mine, 3, 9, 11, 12-13, 21,
 30, 55
 White Cap Mining Company, 55
 White Mountains, 46
 Wilson, Constable Byron, 51
 wine, 18, 27, 57
 Witenburg, Charles F., 11, 20, 55
 wood business, 4-7, 13, 42-44, 57
 Woods, Constable St. Clair, 51
 World War II, 4, 29, 30-33